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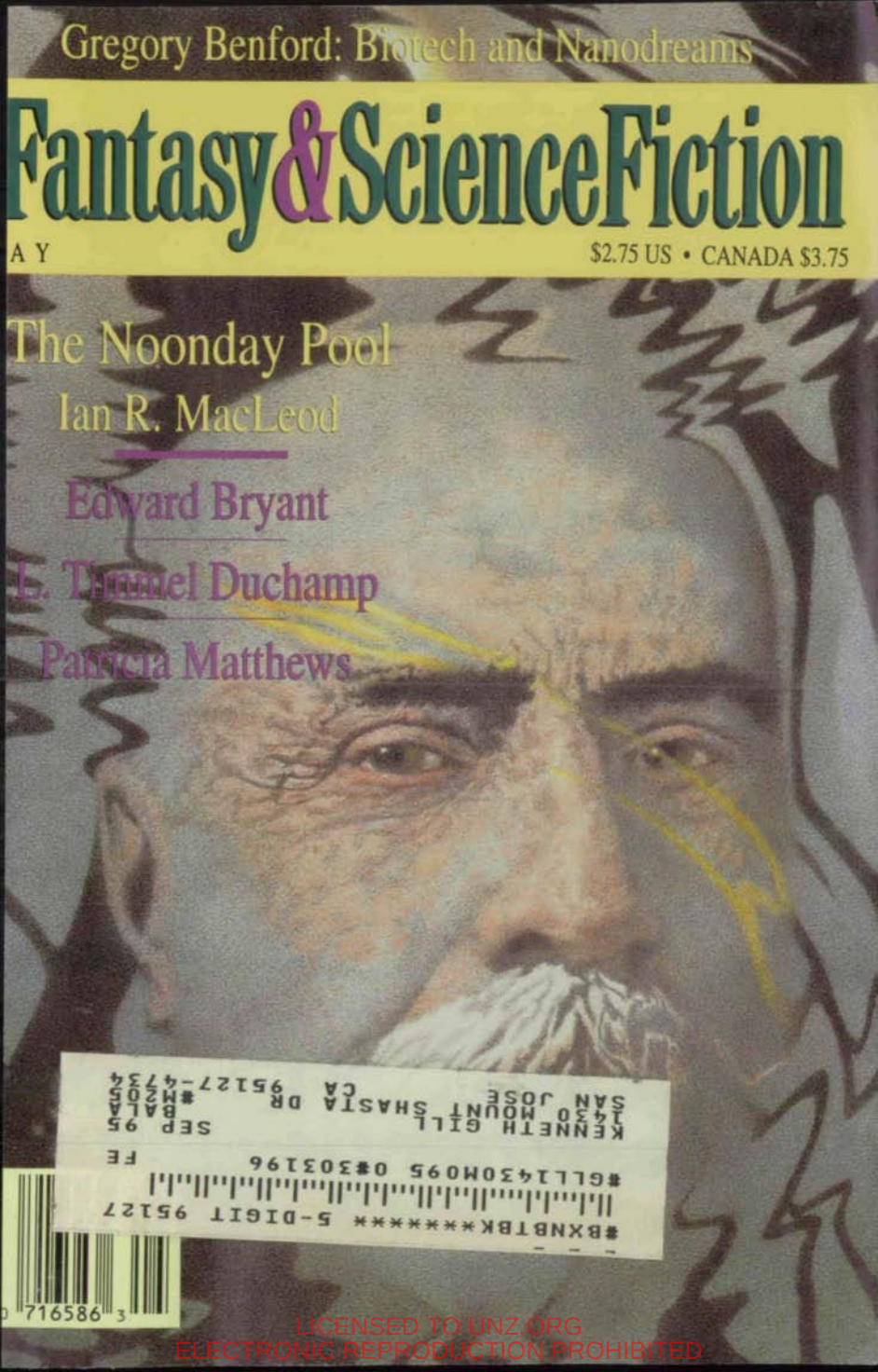

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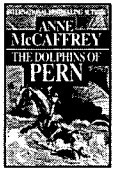

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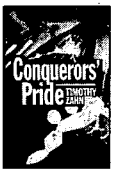

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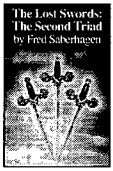

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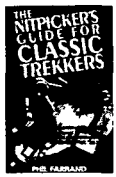

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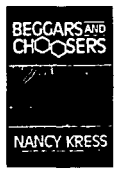

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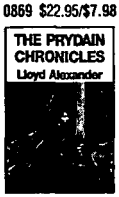

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EDITORIAL

KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH

IN JANUARY I was the guest of honor at Tropicon, a small but delightful convention put on by the South Florida Science Fiction Society. They asked me to give a speech and I did. Never one to waste an opportunity (or a completed essay), I thought I would share a modified version of it with *F&SF's* readers.

At conventions, I try to keep my remarks light. But for this speech, I found myself coming back to a topic that had bothered me for years:

The Sense of Adventure.

It has taken me a long time to come up with that phrase. Folks who have been in the field for a while call it the Sense of Wonder. They speak of the Golden Age of Science Fiction, and how that Sense of Wonder is now missing. Somehow those comments always left me with the idea that sf should view the world through rosy colored helmet goggles, and I would find myself saying,

"Yes, but what about Jack Williamson? *The Humanoids* isn't exactly a cheerful book."

or

"Campbellian science fiction has to encompass Campbell's own writing, which includes 'Who Goes There?', a classic sf horror story."

or more frequently, I'd say something lame like "Even Asimov wrote downers sometimes."

I was missing the point. I got lost in the word "wonder" and couldn't see beyond it. According to my cheap, ancient, non-computerized *Webster's New World Dictionary*, "wonder" means "a person, thing, or event causing astonishment and admiration." Gosh, sure sounds upbeat to me.

Numbers of stories and novels have this sense of admiration. It's present in all of the recent Mars books, and one of its best practitioners is Florida's own Ray Aldridge.

But wonder also means "the feeling aroused by something strange and unexpected," a usage which has declined in the last forty years. It is that usage that sf clings to.

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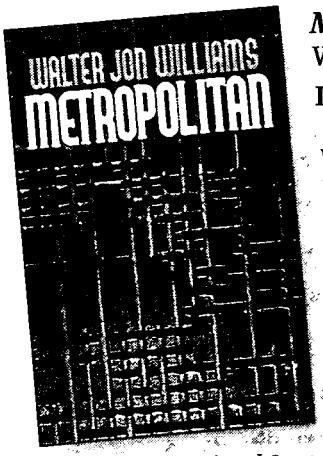

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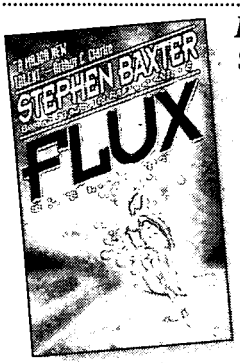

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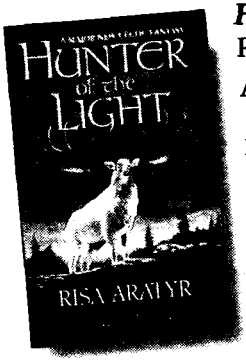

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I think we're better served by saying what is often missing from sf is not a Sense of Wonder, but a Sense of Adventure.

Think about it: when was the last time you picked up a novel and found a galloping ride to the stars? When was the last time you awaited the continuation of a short story because you wanted to see what happened next?

Adventure lovers go to other venues now for this experience. In book form, they get their adventure from the thriller writers, like Clancy, Cussler, and Grisham. But on film, adventure lovers still find excitement in science fiction. If you don't believe me, look at the marquee of the next four-plex you pass. The one I saw on the drive to the airport in Eugene was showing *The Santa Clause*, a fantastic comedy about one man's adventurous experience as Santa Claus; *Star Trek: Generations*, a series that still attempts to boldly go where no one has gone before; *Stargate*, a pretty, not-very-well plotted story about people who travel to a new world; and *Time Cop*, Jean Claude Van Damme's shoot 'em up through time.

Not all these films are good and only *The Santa Clause* makes any bow to the niceties of the fantastic genre. But all are still raking in money months after release when sf novels disappear off the stands within three weeks. All four films provide a sense of adventure.

CNN is doing specials on the rise of science fiction at the box office. *Entertainment Tonight* did an entire segment on the importance of science fiction on television. *The New York Times* declared science fiction the new hot genre of the '90s.

At conventions, fen complain about the influx of "media fandom" who don't understand sf traditions. The field's pundits claim that science fiction is dying. A recent issue of *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* has an essay lamenting that good science fiction is not getting published because no one understands art any more.

Allow me to politely disagree.

Very few people understand Adventure any more, at least not in our genre. Not on the printed page.

Those who do understand Adventure get ridiculed as authors of insignificant fiction. Yet I would not be in this field if it weren't for media sf and insignificant fiction. Those stories took me away from a very unhappy childhood and brought me to a new place where the world was different. They showed me that somewhere people tried and failed and sometimes succeeded against impossible odds. Somewhere people made a difference.

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And that gave me hope.

Which is a whole different thing from Wonder.

Let me explain what I mean by a Sense of Adventure by giving you two real life adventures, one successful, and one unsuccessful:

Meriweather Lewis and William Clark set out in 1803 with an order from President Thomas Jefferson: find a land route to the Pacific ocean, strengthen U.S. claims to the Oregon Territory, and gather information about the Indians. They did, and if you ever look at the country they traveled through, you'll understand what a courageous journey they undertook.

We name cities, colleges, and roads after them because they — explored strange new worlds, sought out new life and new civilizations, and boldly went where no *white* man had ever gone before.

From the perspective of the United States Government, the Lewis and Clark expidition was a great success. From the perspective of the Native Americans, it wasn't. But true adventures are never black or white. They are always painted in gray.

My second example has the status of legend in this country.

In 1846, a group of pioneers left the Midwest with high hopes for a new life in California. Along the way, they experienced a murder, the loss of their leader, and opportunism which made them take a little used southern route. They wound up snowbound in the Sierra Nevadas, and some survived by cannibalism. Of the 87 who set out on this journey, 47 lived.

I picked this example to show that horror has a place in Adventure. Stories like Campbell's "Who Goes There?" fit into this subgenre: that of the great dream gone awry. What better historical example of a great dream gone awry than the Donner party?

They too set out into the great unknown, but like Ripley in *Alien*, they learned that the great unknown can sometimes have very nasty surprises.

Adventure gives us a chance to go somewhere new, see something different, to pit ourselves against a great enemy or a great wildnerness and see if we will survive. Wonder is a part of Adventure, but Wonder isn't the only part. Sometimes Wonder isn't even the most memorable part.

What happened to our Sense of Adventure?

We demeaned it. We listened to the people who emulated mainstream fiction, the people who believe that style is more important than story, the people who think a good sentence

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on page 52 more than makes up for the lack of a plot.

Sf needed to hear that grammar and realistic characterization are important. Some sf of the Golden Age is unreadable now because our tastes are more refined. We have made good strides in language and character motivation. But we can't have these at the expense of the things that made sf important in the first place.

I've started to do my part. I'm banging the drum. I'm having Adventure discussions with my favorite writers.

But we all need to do something. It's time to admit that we prefer Cheetos to caviar. Take the phrase "Guilty Pleasure" out of our vocabulary. Stop apologizing for reading Adventure Fiction. Be honest about the books whose covers we fold back so others can't see us reading them.

Let's continue putting money in the pockets of the Adventure writers, but let's stop complaining as we do so. It's okay to like a writer who "can't write his way out of a paper bag," but who can tell a great story.

Let's share our favorite books with the folks who line up to see *Stargate*. Let's show them that novels can tell a better story with cheaper, more spectacular special effects.

And for god's sake continue reading the stylists. We need them too. No one can survive on a diet of Cheetos. The problem is that we've been trying to survive on caviar. And frankly, sometimes caviar is just fish eggs.

You'll see more adventure in the pages of *F&SF*. Along with it, we'll find horror and wonder, and sometimes we'll wear rosy-colored helmet goggles. Sometimes we'll take them off. The writing will be good—it has to be because the field has changed. But it's time to return to our roots.

I want to thank the folks at Tropicon for asking me to be serious about something Important. I also owe a debt on this speech to Ben Bova and Dean Wesley Smith, and of course, to the readers of this magazine.

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Mary Soon Lee has lived in the United States for the past five years, but she was raised in England. She says she still misses London, where she grew up. Her first professional short story appeared in Aboriginal Science Fiction *in the fall of 1994.*

"Ebb Tide," her first appearance in F&SF, *is an affecting story of an all too plausible future.*

Ebb Tide

By Mary Soon Lee

I'D NEVER EXPECTED TO return to Britain, but there I was, standing in the Immigration line at Heathrow airport. Apparently it used to be one of the busiest airports in the world. When I had flown out twenty years ago, it was already well into its decline. Now most of the buildings and all but one runway were closed down. Half the fluorescent lights had been switched off to conserve power, and the temperature in the terminal was barely above freezing.

I squeezed my daughter's cold hand, glanced down to check that her coat was still buttoned up. She had taken her toy rabbit out of the baggage trolley, and was busy chewing its long ragged gray ears.

"Clarissa — " I tried to get her to let go of the rabbit, but she braced herself, her thin face scrunched up with determination.

"Eat rabbit," Clarissa told me.

The old man ahead of me in the line turned round, his eyes narrowing as he squinted at Clarissa and the vivid blue tattoo on the center of her forehead.

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He nudged the woman beside him. "Look, there's one of those morons behind us. I thought they were all meant to be upgraded by now."

I pulled Clarissa closer to me, but she didn't seem to have heard. Or maybe she didn't understand. Her vocabulary had peaked around her seventh birthday. Now, less than a year later, the hard-gained knowledge was coming unraveled, more words slipping from Clarissa's grasp every day.

Slowly the line shuffled forward, all of us smelling of stale sweat and desperation. The handful of tourists and reporters had long since vanished past the Temporary Visit booth. Anyone crazy enough to be immigrating to Britain had to be desperate in one way or another.

The old couple ahead of me were refused entry. I couldn't hear the reason, but I heard the old man swearing, his face darkening to a choleric red. His wife tugged at his sleeve, and led him away, the two of them trailing across the dim expanse of the terminal.

"Next," called the immigration official.

Swallowing hard, I walked forward. In the chaos of leaving New York, sifting through twenty years of accumulated junk to pack a single suitcase, I'd never considered that I might be denied entry to Britain.

I handed the man my documents, and he paged through them with bored efficiency. "Says here you used to be a British citizen."

"Yes."

"But you took the technical proficiency test, and qualified for entry to the U.S."

"Yes." The words had run out of my head just like Clarissa's. Her fingers were entwined in mine in a sticky knot. I stared at the man dumbly. Despite his navy blue uniform and crew cut hair, he managed to look scruffy. At night, he probably went home, put his feet up on the sofa, and watched telly all evening. But here he was judge and jury, sole arbitrator of our petitions.

"See, we don't ordinarily readmit people who upped and left soon as things got tough. You re-scin-ded your citizenship when you went." He spun out each syllable of *rescinded* as though it were a parliamentary edict. "You got any ex-tenu-ating circumstances?"

"Yes."

He looked at me expectantly.

"My daughter — " the rest of the speech died in my throat. I lifted Clarissa up so that he could see her tattoo.

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He leaned forward, and reached out to touch Clarissa. I put her down quickly, but his face was unexpectedly sympathetic. "My sister had a boy like that. Her husband wanted her to sell him, you know, to America or Japan for upgrading. So my sister divorced him, and she's looking after the kid by herself."

He stamped my papers. "You can go. I've given you unlimited entry on com-pass-ionate grounds. Your daughter looks like a nice kid. Good luck."

"Thank you." Stupidly, I wanted to cry. He didn't know me, but he was trying to be kind. I'd almost forgotten what that felt like. As Clarissa and I were walking away, he called after us, "If you've time, take her to the Zoo. They've got a baby giant panda."

London hadn't changed. Oh, the youngsters were sporting primary-colored bands of body fur instead of the spiky hairstyles I remembered, and there were few private cars left on the road. But in comparison to Los Angeles or Tokyo, it was like stepping into the past. A few decades ago, back when parliament almost revoked the right to silence, pundits predicted that Britain would soon be a Big Brother state, complete with twenty-four hour surveillance and electronic ID cards.

But in 2009, the Ecorights party passed stringent laws forbidding any form of electronic recording or tracking of people's movements. Two years later, they finally gave Britain a constitution, protecting human rights, interstellar alien rights (not that we knew of any aliens), animal rights, and plant rights — all the way down to the endangered country hedgerows. And despite the failing economy and the seesaw of political power, the constitution had survived intact.

As Clarissa tagged along with me on my job-hunt, she kept stopping and looking around as though she'd lost something.

Finally she tugged on my hand as we waited at Piccadilly Circus tube station. "Mummy, where did the eye-spies go?"

"Spy-eyes," I corrected automatically. Then I hoisted her up on my hip. "There aren't any spy-eyes over here. No spy-eyes, no hovercars, and no tattoos."

I brushed her forehead gently. The day we'd flown in, I'd taken Clarissa to Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. The plasterwork was flaking from the walls, and the medical facilities barely rose to X-ray machines, but

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the doctor pretended to talk to Clarissa's rabbit while he examined her. And three hours later, Clarissa had only a fading pink mark on her forehead. They hadn't even charged me.

Clarissa had been remarkably patient during the job-hunt, but I'd noticed the ears on her rabbit getting more and more ragged. Whenever I had to leave her, she took the rabbit out and chewed on it. Sometimes a receptionist would try to play with her, but Clarissa just chewed the rabbit in big-eyed silence until I returned.

I finally found a job predicting rates of chemical contamination in the water supply. On the morning before I was due to start, I took Clarissa to London Zoo. After all the U.S. media reports of starvation caused by Britain's outdated anti-technology stance, I was bemused that they were still keeping the Zoo open. I hadn't seen any evidence of starvation in London itself, but I presumed the situation was worse in other parts of the country, and a single elephant eats enough to feed six families.

But the Zoo was not only open, it was the most crowded, most high-tech place I'd seen since arriving. Children pressed their faces against the one-way walls of the enclosures, watched holographic computer simulations explaining the animals' diets and habitats and life cycles. A pool the size of two football stadiums extended into Regent's Park, filled with eighty dolphins and a bewildering assortment of fish.

Clarissa clutched my hand as we walked through a tunnel extending through the middle of the pool, the blue-green water glowing all around us in the sunlight. She let go of her rabbit for a moment to stare at a baby dolphin sliding up and over the glass tunnel, its gray belly inches from her nose. Audio speakers relayed its high-pitched squeaks, and Clarissa whistled back at it.

She pointed at the water. "Want to go play."

"I'm sorry, that's only for the dolphins. They'd be frightened if you joined them."

"I *want* to *play*."

I took a deep breath. "Clarissa — "

But she'd already switched her attention to a bright yellow ball that was rolling along the tunnel floor. She ran after it, spun it around until the boy who owned it came along. Her fingers trembled as she let him take the ball. I pressed my hands against her fingers, trying to hold them still, but the shaking continued, like a small rapid echo of her heartbeat.

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Clarissa looked up at me. "Mummy sad?"

"No, no — I'm happy." I patted her shoulder. "Let's go and see the bears."

But I'd read the scientific literature on DIMS (degenerative impaired mentation syndrome), and I recognized the symptoms. First, higher level cognitive functions are affected, often causing aphasia and other linguistic problems. Next, secondary motor control functions deteriorate, producing both the onset of palsy and severe tissue damage to Broca's area, the part of the brain that is the center of speech. In this phase, children begin to stutter and develop muscular twitches of increasing severity.

Somehow we'd reached the bear enclosure and one of the zookeepers had just arrived with a bucket of food. Clarissa crouched down, watching intently as the man tossed out food, the bears deftly snagging the carrots and other tidbits with their paws.

I pressed my forehead against the cool metal netting, closed my eyes for a second. Maybe I shouldn't have brought Clarissa back to England, maybe Paul was right. The night Clarissa was diagnosed with DIMS he had held me for hours in bed, not asking questions, not trying to kiss me.

Eventually Paul had cleared his throat. "Emma, I'll go with you to Electrosim in the morning."

"What?" I pulled away from him. "Paul — that's not funny."

His face twisted in a way I'd never seen, harsher, patronizing. "Oh come on, you know we can't keep her. Why would you even want to? Electrosim is nearby and they pay well."

I stood up, started dressing. I'd spent five years with Paul, but this was the first time I'd hated him. He expected me to sell my daughter to Electrosim like a broken car. And then they'd implant the cyber enhancements in her damaged cerebrum, and in a few weeks she'd be sold again as the world's most expensive luxury, a human robot. Add the correct software and she could pilot a hypersonic jet or carry out a preprogrammed sexual fantasy.

"Emma — don't overreact." He sat up in the bed, the fine blond hairs on his chest picked out by the bedside lamp. "I've always been willing to spend time with your daughter, but this is something else again. It's not fair to Clarissa to drag this out. You know I'm right."

"Mummy?"

I snapped back to the present. Feeding time was over, and Clarissa's face was screwed up. "I want to go wee-wee."

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I led her over to the toilets, waited outside her door, wondering how long it would be before she needed help.

Children with second phase DIMS drool and may lose bladder control. It's a messy, ugly disease that steals children piece by piece. I've read the theories about what causes the cellular changes, the impact of various chemical pollutants on the formation of the central nervous system. But none of the theories evoke the reality of the disease as clearly as an interview with one of the first parents of a DIMS child.

He said it was like watching the tide flow out of his son.

And so it was. Every day, another piece of Clarissa ebbed away, and there were pebbles and broken shells left behind, fragments that would never come whole again.

At work, my boss was very tolerant. He allowed me to take Clarissa into the office, where she spent most of the day sitting underneath my desk — holding her rabbit and drawing pictures with fat wax crayons.

I took the pictures back to our rented apartment, pinned them on the walls. At first the pictures were recognizable, pin-stick caricatures of Clarissa and me, bowlegged green and yellow dogs, and luminous pink fish. After a month, I had to ask her what the swirling loops of color meant. After another month, she couldn't answer.

But she smiled.

Her smile widened as her vocabulary shrank. Except for the brief periods when I had to leave her, or the jab of a syringe on our weekly appointment at Great Ormond Street Hospital, she seemed to always be smiling.

One evening in April, after work, we celebrated her eighth birthday in our apartment. I'm not sure Clarissa knew what the cake represented, but she beamed at me while I blew the candles out. Seconds later, she had chocolate cake over everything from her cheeks to the tablecloth.

I spooned a little of it into her mouth, checked her diapers, carried her over to the bay window. The rain was still pelting down, the sky nearly dark though it was only six o'clock.

Clarissa laid the side of her face against the window. Maybe she was listening to the rain, the different sounds as it splashed against the glass window, the leaves, the puddles in the gutter. Provided I overlooked the

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persistent tremor of her skinny arms, she looked like a normal child.

I knelt down beside her, and hugged her tight, breathing in the clean sweet smell of her hair.

Two days later, Clarissa had a severe asthmatic attack. I held her in my lap, waiting for the ambulance to arrive, waiting for each wheeze of air from her lungs. The skin around her nose and mouth paled, then tinged to blue.

A siren wailed toward us, and I raced out to the road. The paramedic had to force my fingers loose from Clarissa's arms. All the way to the hospital, I sat opposite her, watching the imprint of my fingers fade from her arms, the thin oxygen mask hiding her face.

The hospital waiting room was a blank horror. All I remember was the tea, thick white pottery cups of lukewarm sugary liquid. And then the doctor's face, briskly sympathetic above his starched labcoat. "We'll need to keep Clarissa hospitalized from now on. Her autonomic nervous system is beginning to be affected."

He led me to the ward, steered me to the chair by her bed.

Clarissa was sedated, an oxygen mask fastened over her nose and mouth. I didn't even know if I wanted her to wake up. I wasn't sure she'd recognize me. I wasn't sure I'd recognize my daughter in what was left of Clarissa.

I closed my eyes, Paul's parting shot returning across the months.

"What do you want to do? Watch your daughter turn into a vegetable because upgrading is unnatural? That's selfish bullshit." Paul lowered his voice, held out both hands palm up. "If she's upgraded, then she can give something back to society."

And in a way Paul was right; I'd known that all along. The American administration is chiefly concerned about the economics — whether the U.S. is a net importer or exporter of human robots, whether they can be used to boost national productivity.

From the start they overlooked abuses in the system: mothers who took drugs to induce subnormal babies so they could sell them, children condemning their parents as legally senile so they too could be upgraded. Three weeks before I left America, Congress passed a bill making upgrading compulsory for all subnormals.

Yet despite that, despite the rich men who buy nubile human robots for evening entertainments that aren't subject to the usual restrictive laws, most hu-bots are used constructively. The U.S. has thousands of hu-bots in the

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emergency services alone. Equipped with infrared sensory enhancements, they compute optimal trajectories through smoke-filled buildings, calculating the maximum stress they can put on their bodies without concerns about pain or panic.

The human body is more physically dexterous and adaptable than any machine yet built. Interface some electronic controls to the basic human nervous system, and the result is a triumph of modern technology.

I opened my eyes, stared at Clarissa in the hospital bed.

Maybe if I'd been a better person, I would have sold her. I smoothed her hair back from her cheek, picked up her cold hand lying still on the sheet, squeezed it.

Only, only no one knew what the hu-bots felt inside, whether they ever wondered why they were trapped in bodies that no longer listened to them. The surgeons open up the subject's skull, insert the electronics, use destructive gene therapy that wipes out many neuron links even as it halts any further degradation of the nervous system. Once the procedure is finished, the software has control of the mouth and eyes and muscles.

If there's anyone left inside, they have no means to communicate, no way of asking what happened.

I let go of Clarissa's hand, walked down the ward, past a dozen beds with other DIMS children. Beneath the surface disinfectant, the hospital smelled of aging brick walls riddled with damp. Half the blankets had holes in them.

The boy at the far end had been there for two years, comatose for most of that time. An oversized orange duck nestled at the crook of his left arm, but that was just some adult's sentimentality. Unlike the hu-bots, we can be virtually certain that third phase DIMS victims are oblivious to their surroundings, their intellect destroyed.

I paced back to Clarissa, stared at the ragged-ear rabbit at the bottom of her bed. There was a promise I'd broken.

While she could still understand, I did my best to explain DIMS to Clarissa. She wanted to see how it would change her, but of course there were no advanced DIMS cases in New York — they'd all been upgraded. So we watched a video together on an antiquated VCR, white static flickering across the picture. The boy on the tape forgot the words for knife, and baseball, and the name of his sister. He stumbled when saying Mommy; a ribbon of drool tracked down his shirt; his arms quivered like the flutter of broken wings.

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Clarissa had ejected the tape, scrunched up her fists. With careful precision she said slowly, "I don't want ever to be like that. Don't let that happen to me."

"Hush, now." I had folded her against me, rocked her.

"Mummy, I mean it. Please don't let it happen. I'd rather be a robot."

"I won't let it happen, I won't."

But I lied. I kept telling myself that tomorrow I'd take Clarissa to Electrosim. I'd stipulate in the contract that her body was not to be sold to a private buyer, but instead used in one of the humanitarian projects.

And then tomorrow had slipped into the day after, and the day after that. Congress passed the bill that rendered upgrading compulsory, and I had fled here to London.

I took one last look at Clarissa lying in the bed, walked to the nurse's station. "I'd like to sign the euthanasia agreement."

I signed the paper. The doctor came. They wheeled Clarissa to a private room, slipped the needle into the thin blue vein of her wrist.

I decided to stay in London. There was a voluntary organization that helped parents of DIMS children, and I even joined a local environmental group. I kept myself busy, but the loneliness grew. Even my memory of Clarissa blurred, until I couldn't recall the shape of her eyes, the texture of her hair.

One afternoon in November, I went to London Zoo and stood by the bear enclosure. The keeper was throwing food, and I watched the bears snag carrots and apples in mid-flight. I remembered Clarissa crouching down beside me, the warmth of her body against my legs, the way the weak sunlight gilded her hair.

And day by day, the memories returned to me, bringing back the wholeness of Clarissa's life, an unexpected benison.

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BOOKS

ROBERT K.J. KILLHEFFER

Quarantine by Greg Egan, HarperPrism, 288 pages, $4.50

Happy Policeman by Patricia Anthony, Harcourt Brace, 282 pages, $21.95

Beyond the Veil of Stars by Robert Reed, Tor Books, 320 pages, $21.95

THERE'S A famous fifteenth-century woodcut (untitled and anonymous, as far as I can tell) that vividly illustrates the spirit of the scientific revolution, which was just starting to pick up speed at the time: to the right of the picture is a landscape of small hills, quiet villages, trees, under a beaming beneficent sun, and arching over it all like a dome is a sky full of stars; on the left, a scholar (clearly identified by his cap and gown) kneels on the ground and thrusts his head through the celestial dome as though through a curtain or the soapy film of a bubble, and behind or beyond the stars he finds the mechanisms (pictured as literal wheels) which govern the movements of the heavens.

This is the core of the scientific process — seeing beyond the everyday in order to understand the basic underpinnings of the world, piercing the veil in order to solve the mysteries of creation. And if piercing the veil is so essential to science, it's no wonder that it's such a common theme in science fiction. One of sf's central paradigms is the "breakthrough," whether on a cosmic level of transcendence, the more mundane level of scientific insights and technological fixes, or the even plainer level of individual perceptions — as in classic "puzzle stories" or stories of psychological growth, where the breakthrough has only limited local relevance. Even stories which don't explicitly resolve their central mysteries with a breakthrough — think of the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey* — play off the expectation that people will try to pierce veils and

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discover the truth. They use mystery as a motivator.

Perhaps the best place to see this paradigm at work, though, is in stories about cities or the whole planet somehow isolated from the rest of the universe. Writers use various devices to set the scenario up — some have had aliens steal whole cities from the face of the planet, others have had aliens set a force field around a town, and still others have dispensed with aliens altogether, offering no obvious explanation for whatever phenomenon cuts one part of the cosmos off from another. But however it's done, the sudden-isolation scenario offers not only an instant sense of drama (which doesn't hurt) but also an ideal structure for examining some of the fundamental conflicts of human experience: reason versus emotion, chaos versus order, possibility versus limitation, self versus other, freedom versus bondage.

Greg Egan's *Quarantine* is a good case in point. Published in hardcover in Britain in 1992, it's only now finding its way into an American edition. And it's about time — *Quarantine* is one of most interesting sf novels to come along in years. I'd applaud it simply for Egan's rigorous extrapolation of quantum mechanics (which often gets no more than lip service from sf writers), and for the purely science-fictional thrill his speculations provide, but those speculations also cast light on some of the above-mentioned dichotomies, and that gives *Quarantine* a level of intellectual depth which more than compensates for the somewhat derivative nature of his near-future setting and *noir*-styled thriller plot.

Egan's mid-21st-century is a world of giant corporations and an evolving economy of information, tied together by vast computer networks; neural modification is not only simple, but practically *de rigueur* for many occupations, and nanotechnology makes the process over-the-counter easy; ozone depletion has increased the dangers of ultraviolet sunlight, so many inhabitants of sunny regions (such as southern Australia, where our narrator, Nick Stavrianos, lives) have modified their pigmentation to a safer dark black.

But there's something else happening in this world — the Bubble. In November 2034 the whole world watched as a black shell of some kind formed itself around the entire solar system, "a perfect sphere, twelve billion kilometers in radius." It's not a physical object, but some sort of field effect, whose inner surface acts "like

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a concave version of a black hole's event horizon." The upshot: nothing can escape the solar system, not even light, and nothing (so far as humans can tell) can get in. Quarantine.

At first it seems rather easy to read *Quarantine* as a sort of meditation on the standard sf theme of reason versus irrationality, science against superstition. Nick is a private detective (that is, like the scholar of the woodcut, a seeker after knowledge) hired to investigate a bizarre case: Laura Andrews, brain damaged beyond hope since birth and confined to an institution, has disappeared — kidnapped, he assumes, at least until he finds out that she had escaped and been brought back at least twice before. He's also a former police officer, packed with neural "mods" that give him inhuman precision, concentration, calm, and judgment in crisis situations — he's the epitome of reason. He's even got a mod he installed after his wife Karen was killed, which provides him with a simulacrum of her while simultaneously damping out all his feelings of grief and distress over her death. She was killed by the Children of the Abyss, a Millennial cult which believes that the Bubble has ushered in an age of utter anarchy which they have to make real through violence and terror. The Children represent for Nick all the evils of irrational thinking, what he calls "the pathological assignment of meaning — religion, astrology, superstitions of every kind."

But Egan doesn't leave it at that, a simple dichotomy between reason and unreason in which reason will eventually triumph. Along the way he laces the text with juxtapositions between seeming and reality that reinforce the growing sense that there's much more at stake here, metaphorically and otherwise, than the solution to Laura's disappearance. Nick watches a genengineered hummingbird and hopes in vain to see it "contravene its programming by straying from the circle"; he observes hustling executives on the streets of New Hong Kong, surprised by the paradoxical feeling that "the sight of these umbrella-wielding infocrats hurrying by, radiating self-importance, strikes me as some kind of affirmation of the human spirit"; and he notices "lawns so perfect that if they're real, they might as well not be." The world is full of artifice and deception, the evidence of the senses is not reliable; the truth lies somehow behind the veil.

Then there are the ubiquitous neural mods. They make Nick into the epitome of rationality, but it doesn't take long to realize that he

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may be too rational for his own good. The mods work like the Bubble, cutting off options of thought, effectively quarantining his emotions. We begin to wonder whether his extreme rationality might be just a mirror image of the fanatical irrationality of the Children of the Abyss, and it's not long before the plot twists and confirms such suspicions.

Nick gets caught breaking into a laboratory where he believes Laura's been taken, and his captors fit him with a new mod — a loyalty mod, which gives him an unquestioning sense of devotion to something called the Ensemble (an unfortunate name, I think, neither ominous nor innocuous enough to send the right shiver down the spine). Otherwise he's the same old Nick, but now he finds he's not only incapable of disloyalty, but even of *wanting* to be disloyal. He knows that he "would have" wanted to be free of the mod before, but now that he has it, he literally can't feel that way.

The loyalty mod casts Nick's unhealthy dependence on his mods into sharp relief, and we begin to see how much he's invested in keeping certain possibilities of thought at bay. When he thinks the Karen mod might be malfunctioning, he panics: "the mere thought that *this* mod might fail, too — that everything it rules out, everything from which it shields me, might become *possible* again — leaves me momentarily light-headed with fear." The idea of piercing the veil has always scared him, and he's fled from it. He even uses that phrase at one point: *"I don't want to hear the Ensemble's secrets; I don't want to hear the final, worldly, explanation; I don't want to pierce the veil."*

But he has to learn those secrets, and they are what tie the plot so far to the question of the Bubble. For the first half of the book it has seemed almost irrelevant, but the Bubble actually shapes the entire narrative. Right at the outset Nick describes his feeling of "a contradictory mixture of claustrophobia and a dizzying sense of The Bubble's inhuman dimensions," and it's this "contradictory mixture" that represents the dominant tension of the book — the conflict between possibility and limitation, chaos and order.

The Ensemble is working on a mod that can give the user influence over the collapse of the quantum wave-function. I won't enter into any elaborate summary of that idea here (Egan does it well enough in the book), but most people have heard of Schödinger's cat and the uncertainty principle. Quantum physics says that many possibilities for the outcome of events coexist simultaneously until someone or something *observes*

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the outcome, "collapsing" the system into one state or another, and the Ensemble mod would make it possible to influence that outcome in more than a random way. What's more, the experimenters theorize that life on Earth has developed this ability to collapse wave-functions, while life elsewhere has not, and that by observing the universe as we have done we have been increasingly destroying huge swaths of possibility in which other lifeforms thrived "uncollapsed." That's why they put the Bubble over us, to prevent us from doing any further damage to their uncollapsed states.

An uncollapsed cosmos would be one of infinite possibility, whereas a collapsed version reduces itself to only one, and at first Nick's psyche — devoted to reason and order, terrified by open possibility — rebels. "When Rutherford showed that atoms were mostly empty space," he argues, "did the ground become any less solid? The truth itself changes nothing." Then he encounters others who have the loyalty mod as well, and they teach him how to outthink it by a kind of heresy — the mod just says they must be loyal to the Ensemble, but it doesn't say what the Ensemble is. What if the leaders of the Ensemble are wrong? Then it's their duty to oppose them....

This is the epitome of irrationality — in a closed, self-referential system like that of the loyalty mod, you can prove just about anything — and even Nick immediately sees its parallel with religious modes of thought — "if I *can* somehow believe it, that's enough to make it true," he realizes. "Common sense, everyday logic, simply don't come into it." He even thinks of this process as "The Reformation."

The subversion of the loyalty mod, and the increasing success of the Ensemble researchers at influencing the wave-function collapse, deepen Nick's epistemological crisis. His carefully wrought psychological barriers start to erode — free of the loyalty mod, he can now see that the source of his freedom from it is just as much an abstraction as the "quantum ontology" of infinite possibilities that he deplores. He can't pretend to himself that such abstract ideas are irrelevant any longer, because he and the other conspirators plan to use the new technology to challenge the "sham" Ensemble at last, and Nick will be the main enactor of the plot. He's going to put the Ensemble mod and the uncertainties it generates to practical use, and his cultivated emotional quarantine may not withstand the pressure.

As the book and the plot wind to a close, the various conflicts and

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tensions Egan's been developing become hopelessly tangled. Nick has overcome his excessive rationality with a dose of irrational logic. He's made good use of the infinite possibilities opened by the Ensemble mod, but clearly unlimited use of the mod would lead to chaos. And he's even come to see his mods as "unnatural." There are no simple dichotomies anymore. One might look at that as an endorsement of balance—neither unemotional reason nor utter irrationality, neither infinite possibility nor none, but an Earth with stars, a tangible world of solid ground and a vault of possibilities, a waking life and dreams.

That sounds good, but neither Nick nor Egan make any gesture in that direction. The Earth remains Bubbled at the end, without stars. So what are we to make of all this? It's left somewhat up to the reader, but there are some hints of resolution. Nick recognizes toward the end that the Bubble really didn't set a limit, it merely pointed out a limit that already existed (since humanity has not found any sort of lightspeed drive to take it to the stars). The mods, likewise, are just extreme cases of psychological gymnastics and self-imposed walls that people have always used. After all the struggle it appears that the only conclusion is something that Nick has known all along: that whatever odd truths underlie reality, *"It all adds up to normality."* Knowing the truth, in other words, doesn't mean you can do anything about it, doesn't mean that it changes anything about the choices you face.

At first such an ending might seem like a cop out — Nick told us that the appearance of the Bubble changed nothing way back in the first chapter. But he also told us that it changed everything, and what he's come to see by the end is that this seeming paradox is no contradiction after all. The Bubble certainly changes the way we look at the cosmos, implying the existence of superpowerful aliens and so forth, but it also need have no immediate effect on life on Earth, which can proceed essentially unchanged. And that, in fact, is one of the things implied in that old woodcut. The scholar's discovery of the machineries of heaven needn't shake the world, topple kings, or halt the seasons in their gyre. The truth behind the everyday appearance of things doesn't *change* the everyday appearance of things in the least.

Which is not to say the truth *may* not shake the world, as in fact it did; but that's a matter of our choice, not any kind of inevitability. And that's a worthwhile observation when

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it comes to our own grappling with the implications of quantum physics and other potentially disturbing scientific theories. We are creatures of time and contingency, and even if the universe really operates on some indeterminate observer-dependent principle at a quantum level, knowing that doesn't alter the everyday problems we've always faced. It all adds up to normality. How we live with that remains our eternal struggle.

Patricia Anthony's *Happy Policeman* has a wildly different feel from *Quarantine*, but it takes a surprisingly similar look at the implications of quantum mechanics through the lens of a sudden-isolation story. Here the isolated locale is the tiny Texas town of Coomey, cut off from the rest of the world by the opaque and impenetrable Line. Beyond it, everyone believes, lies nothing but a scorched ruin, a nuclear wasteland — the last news they remember receiving was of Ronald Reagan ordering a surprise attack on the Soviet Union in 1985, missiles launching, doomsday coming, and since then they've lived behind the Line under the care of the alien Torku, who see to Coomey's various needs.

Things have been peaceful, even rather dull, in the six years since the Line went up, and that's one of the most striking things about Anthony's scenario. The Torku provide almost anything Coomey's residents ask for, on demand, but very little has changed. Everyone's got a big-screen TV and top-of-the-line VCR, but that's about the extent of their ambitions. They've stayed in the same houses, maintaining their lives as closely as possible to what they had been before the Line. One town cop still lies in wait for speeders on the town's main strip.

The book begins, though, with a big event to shake things up — murder. Loretta Harper, Mary Kay cosmetics rep, dead in the woods. DeWitt Dawson, Coomey's police chief, is suddenly faced with a mystery and real police work to do again, and even in a town like Coomey, there are plenty of suspects: Loretta's ex-husband Billy, her maybe-boyfriend Hubert Foster, even DeWitt's wife Janet. But the most disturbing evidence seems to implicate the Torku themselves, and if that's proven the comfortable status quo in Coomey won't last long — the benevolent (if enigmatic) Torku will be seen as invaders, zookeepers, oppressors.

With the murder-mystery plot in the forefront, DeWitt would seem to be the obvious knowledge-seeker in *Happy Policeman*, but as in

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Quarantine things are not so simple. DeWitt is trying to pierce the veil around the murder, but not out of a desire for knowledge — rather, it becomes clear very soon that, like Nick, he's most concerned with maintaining order, including the Line and the Torku who created it. He's almost more willing to believe that his wife was part of the killing than that the Torku were involved; when the evidence pointing toward the aliens starts to mount, DeWitt refuses to implicate them, "'Because the Torku are the only order we have left!'"

Jimmy Schoen, the town's fanatical preacher, is the most outspoken critic of the Torku and the most interested in breaking down the Line and finding out what's happened outside. But we quickly see that his motives for piercing the veil aren't what we'd expect either: Pastor Jimmy doesn't want to *find out* what's happened outside, he believes he already knows, and he wants to bring the Line down because he thinks the Torku are minions of hell and Coomey is in a kind of Purgatory — that when the Line comes down Judgment Day will follow and the Kingdom of Heaven will descend.

Pastor Jimmy's personal motives are very similar to DeWitt's — he's also obsessed with control. "Hell, Schoen had discovered, was not made of flame but of an obliging, seductive anarchy." He wants his wife to obey him, his parishioners to follow him, and he wants his prophecy to be true because it would confirm the order he has built his life around. As in *Quarantine*, at the outset it seems both extremes (reason and superstition) are just mirror images of each other.

But as events progress, DeWitt begins to change — or at least to see that he must. His investigation is getting nowhere; he switches suspects and theories almost daily. He's begun to believe that his wife is having an affair. He strikes one of his children for the first time. And he's not having any luck controlling events in town either. The murder has shaken everyone up, and they're getting mad at the Torku, preparing to revolt. Worst of all, frustrated by the Torku's cryptic responses to his questions, he's coming to believe they killed Loretta as well.

But all this ferment leads DeWitt into discovering what the Torku have come for and why they put up the Line — "'to teach at least one of your people the truth, so resonance may be sustained.'" The Torku think that the way humans view the world is having damaging effects on other, parallel universes, and the only way

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to stop that is to educate them, to help them pierce the veil and see the reality behind the illusion. The real Line, they think, is the one in human minds. To the Torku, perception and belief can have a profound effect on the nature of reality; "'All things affect the spin of the electron,'" the Torku leader Seresen tells DeWitt.

The Torku conception of reality runs straight up against DeWitt's faith in order and reason, and at first he rejects it outright, but when his life at home and his investigation have bottomed out he begins to consider Seresen's message. Like Nick, he's trying to see beyond the evidence of his senses, beyond his long-honed common sense and everyday logic, to catch a glimpse of a more universal underlying truth. And that truth undermines DeWitt's comfortable illusions about order. It's exactly the same process pictured in the woodcut: in the fifteenth century, most people would have thought it equally nonsensical to propose that the Earth revolved around the sun and spun on its axis. Everyone could see that the sun moved around the Earth, and we'd feel something if the Earth were spinning so rapidly beneath our feet, right?

This is where the odd static quality of Coomey comes in. People's unwillingness to change is what the Torku are hoping to overcome. In the Torku view, there are an infinitude of possible universes, and a big factor in determining which one you'll live in is what you hope for and believe in — in other words, they think people can influence the wave-function collapse even without an Ensemble mod. But Coomey staunchly clings to its familiar version of reality even when it's not desirable or pleasant; when first Bo and then DeWitt think about *arresting* a Torku and *reading them their rights* we have to laugh at the lengths to which they'll go to prop up the status quo. Arrest these superpowerful aliens? What rights, under what system? The people of Coomey remain blind to other possibilities, even to the fact that their chosen way of life is but one of a multitude.

In fact, DeWitt doesn't come to see things Seresen's way — at least, not fast enough. The balance tips instead when Seresen watches a graveside prayer. The tangible belief in a better world is just what the Torku are looking for: "'The kids are playing, the sun's shining, and every flower, every green leaf, every one of God's butterflies are out. You know that. Say it, then. Say it loud, like you believe it.'" That night, the Line comes down.

But then it is DeWitt after all who makes the real effort to tear the

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curtain aside. Everyone's afraid of what they'll find outside — no one wants to be the first to look, no one believes enough. DeWitt takes to his squad car, and as he drives it seems he's gotten something out of the Torku lessons after all; like Dorothy wishing herself out of Oz with "There's no place like home," DeWitt tries to conjure the world up with hope: "He'd concentrate hard, because home had to be there." And, what do you know, it is. No nuclear war. In fact, no one even notices that he's been gone for six years. It's now 1991, and DeWitt catches sight of CNN coverage of the revolution in Russia — Yeltsin atop a tank, Russians waving American flags and laughing.

Which leaves us to wonder if the Torku were speaking literally when they lectured DeWitt about the nature of reality. Does wishing really make it so? Did DeWitt wish the world — a world that avoided nuclear war — into existence? In *Quarantine*, Egan makes the concept seem vaguely plausible with the mods and a detailed discussion of quantum mechanics, but I can't imagine many readers finding it easy to swallow here, and not just because of the logistical problems (i.e., what if one person wishes one thing and someone else wishes another? who wins? or do we all just end up living in our own universes, totally alone?). I remember feeling DeWitt's sense of euphoria and infinite possibility back in 1991, watching the Cold War come crashing down; I remember the sense of rightness it had, and the sense that all it took was for people on both sides to stop believing that we *had* to be enemies, that we *had* to point missiles at each other — just to imagine another kind of world, and there we were. But, by 1994, it feels a bit dated. Now we've seen how hard it is for Russia to change to a market economy, for regional hostilities buried under the influence of superpowers to be put aside. The power of belief certainly plays a major role in starting such a process, but the changes aren't made in an instant of wishing. It can't all be done by DeWitt clicking his heels.

Luckily, Anthony doesn't leave it there. She ties up some of the logic — how could six years have passed and no one notices that Coomey was gone? — and in the process she makes it clear that DeWitt didn't actually *create* this world out of scratch. It seems likely that, behind the line, the people of Coomey had been mistaken about the nuclear war (in fact, Pastor Jimmy may have lied about it intentionally). The lesson is not that you can get whatever you want

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simply by wishing, but that opening the mind to the possibilities and hoping for the best can make a difference. At the end, DeWitt finally sees that, and sets about repairing his relationship with Janet, making a happier life for himself.

Despite the echoes of quantum physics and chaos theory in the Torku's lessons, piercing the veil in *Happy Policeman* isn't really about understanding the scientific principles that underlie reality. It's about tearing aside psychological curtains, illusions that stand between people and happiness. When DeWitt decides to adopt a more optimistic outlook, nothing changes in the outside world, but he suddenly *feels* a lot better — and the chances are that, feeling better, he'll make some changes to the outside world. That's the Torku message. It might sound a bit trite here in my summary, but one of the strengths of Anthony's work is her ability to blend thoughtful sf with well-played scenes of human feeling. Her characters — DeWitt in particular — are complex without being intellectual, and so DeWitt's personal transcendence seems natural, believable, even inevitable. *Happy Policeman* is moving, surreal, funny, and inspirational all at once. It may not have the pure narrative drive of a near-future thriller like Anthony's *Cold Allies*, but it is her most deeply affecting and emotionally resonant book so far.

In *Beyond the Veil of Stars*, Robert Reed gives us a sudden-isolation story with an even more expressly personal focus than *Happy Policeman*. When the Change comes, "everting" the sky into a kind of one-way mirror that lets blazing daylight in as usual but reflects the image of the daylit side of the planet at night (utterly obscuring any view of the stars), it leaves the world very little altered. Once it's clear that no dire effects will be felt, life goes on very much as before. But for Cornell Novak, twelve years old at the time, it has a profound impact, both on his relationship with his father and on his future.

Cornell has grown up chasing evidence of UFOs and other mysteries with his dad and their friend Pete, and he's believed with all his heart (and his dad's confirmation) that his mother was abducted by aliens when he was very young. As he grows into adolescence, he loses sympathy with his father's obsessions, but he never questions his mother's abduction until Pete's wife hints at a much more mundane truth. In a rage over his deception, Cornell essentially disowns his father, rupturing their relationship for good.

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In Part II we find Cornell in his mid-thirties, a rootless drifter whose intelligence has kept him in good employment though he's moved from job to job like a tumbleweed. Now he takes a job with the Cosmic Event Agency (CEA), which has been investigating the Change since it occurred; they've secretly discovered "quantum intrusions" which give access to strange other worlds. Human explorers are transformed as they pass through into the shapes of local lifeforms, though they retain their minds intact. Cornell gets assigned to a world they call High Desert, where humans emerge as small multibodied ratlike creatures.

Cornell's experiences in High Desert occupy the bulk of the book, but the real focus is on the personal transformation that begins when he takes the CEA job. Almost immediately he finds himself reconsidering his past, thinking about his father, his mother, the choices he's made. The forced change of perspective that comes with *being* an alien in High Desert fosters the process, as does Cornell's growing relationship with one of the other High Desert crew, a woman with the exotic name of Porsche Neal.

On his frequent breaks from the CEA (few explorers can stay transformed for more than a few weeks without psychological trouble), Cornell acts on his changing attitudes. He tries to reconcile with his father, but fails at first. He secretly visits his dad's house, looking through old photographs and videos, and begins to see his mother in a new light He even hires a detective to find her, and his reunion with her only confirms his suspicion that she was hardly the perfect being of his childhood memories. Marveling at the bizarrity of his recent experiences, Cornell wonders to himself *"Who in his right mind would believe it?"* and then answers his own question: "he knew who. Knew exactly who.... *Dad would swallow it all in an instant.*" Bit by bit, Cornell begins to sympathize with his father again.

For all its obvious differences, *Beyond the Veil of Stars* reproduces some of the patterns of *Quarantine* and *Happy Policeman.* Cornell's personal journey, like Nick's and DeWitt's, begins with a devotion to reason and order — in the person of his father, the investigator of mysteries. But quickly he (and we) see that his father is hardly rigorous in his research and his theories, and after the Change he only becomes more clearly unreasonable. Cornell's alienation from his father really rests on his sense of outrage over being deceived ("The lynchpin of Cornell's life — his mother's abduction — was

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a fabrication"), over the violation of the truth. And in Part II Cornell begins to wrestle with some of the same conflicts facing Nick and DeWitt — the safety and simplicity of a static life versus the risks and fears of change, the value of reason versus the importance of emotion, and so forth. In the end, Cornell likewise finds that piercing the veils can't *change* the truth, but it does allow you to make better decisions about how to live with that truth.

Oddly, for all its focus on matters of personal psychology and character, *Beyond the Veil of Stars* offers more of a cosmic sense of breakthrough than either Egan's or Anthony's novels. Though the Change remains permanent, the quantum intrusions offer doorways to other worlds — a real chance for physical transcendence and transformation. But Reed leaves those possibilities merely implied, not explored. The main strength of his novel remains in its sensitive focus on Cornell's character. The first third of the book alone, taking Cornell from Change Day to his renunciation of his father, has a vividness, honesty, and precision rarely encountered in sf, particularly when it comes to younger characters. Even amid the excitement of the Change, when a woman brushes against Cornell, "he felt her breasts against him, and he tried to commit them to memory." Anyone who was ever a twelve-year-old boy can recognize themselves there, and it's Reed's ability to mingle the awe and wonder of big sf ideas like the Change with such moments of down-to-earth observation that makes *Beyond the Veil of Stars* one of the best sf novels of 1994.

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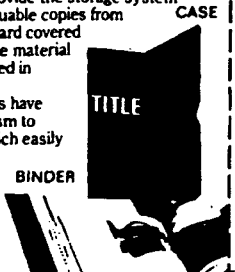

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Books To Look For

CHARLES DE LINT

Archangel, by Mike Conner, Tor, 1995, 352pp, $21.95, hc

FOR ALL that books continue to be placed into specific genre slots for marketing purposes, more and more authors see such constrictions as limiting and are simply ignoring them when they write. They merrily mix and match their themes so that we see romances with sf or fantasy trappings, mysteries set in outer space or historical settings, alternate histories validated by solid scientific speculation. And sometimes all of the above.

Case in point, Mike Conner's novel *Archangel*.

Set in Minneapolis after WW I, Conner's novel presents us with a 1920s beset with a terrible plague that has destroyed ninety percent of the West's white population, leaving blacks untouched. The plague, known as Hun, comes in two forms: it either immediately kills you with profuse internal bleeding, or you carry it for awhile and the first time you're cut, you bleed to death. Particularly hard-struck by the chronic strain are women during their menstrual cycle. As the whites slowly die out, racial tensions mount. Blacks are happy to wait as the plague runs its course. Whites are desperate to find a cure and resent the blacks their immunity.

Against this backdrop Conner tells the story of a newspaper photographer named Danny Constantine and his circle of friends. Because Hun has killed off most of the newspaper's reporters, Constantine finds himself writing stories as well as providing photos. The trouble is, all the stories he covers are innocuous, so when he stumbles upon a series of weird murders that appear to be the work of a vampire, he goes after the story, even when he knows his paper won't print it.

But the murder mystery is only part of the story. Equal time is given to the mutual attraction between Constantine and a society debutante named Selena who works with the

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disadvantaged; to Constantine's friend Lou, a young white baseball player who gets seduced by the Klu Klux Klan; to the homicide cop Dooley Willson, investigating the "vampire" murders; and to the mysterious Archangel of the book's title who operates a pirate radio show that transmits the real news.

Conner does a fine job balancing all the disparate elements. His prose is sometimes a little too workmanlike, but most of the book reads well and captures the spirit of the times effectively. The plot keeps the reader guessing most of the time. I figured out the two major mysteries early on in the book — the identities of the Archangel and the serial killer — but I was wrong about one of them, so there you go.

Archangel should appeal to those who like murder mysteries, alternative histories, solid scientific speculation, and well-presented arguments concerning social mores. It will especially appeal to those who don't mind a mix of all of the above in the same book.

She Walks These Hills, by Sharon McCrumb, Scribners, 1994, 336pp, $21.00 hc

In the late 1700s, Katie Wyler was kidnapped by the Shawnee from her home in the Appalachian Mountains. Escaping, she embarked on a desperate, month-long trek back through hundreds of miles of wilderness, with her feet wrapped in bandages and no food or shelter. The hill people say she can still be seen following game trails back to her old home, "when the air is crisp, and the light is slanted, and the birds are still."

In the present time, a historian named Jeremy Cobb is following the Appalachian Trail, attempting to retrace Katie's journey. Ill-prepared and with no backpacking experience, he soon becomes lost. Also walking those hills is Hiram "Harm" Sorley, an escaped convict, serving a life sentence for the murder of a neighbor, thirty years ago. In his late sixties now, Harm is suffering from Korsakoff's syndrome which strips away short term memory almost as soon as it occurs. He lives perpetually in the time that existed before he was sent to prison.

This is Sharon McCrumb's third visit to Hamelin, Tennessee, and the members of its small police force. *If Ever I Return, Pretty Peggy-O* was Sheriff Spencer Arrowood's story, *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* Deputy Joe LeDonne's. Both of them return in *She Walks These Hills*, but this novel belongs to Martha Ayers, the dispatcher who is determined to make her temporary position of deputy a permanent one.

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The best way to do that, Ayers decides, is to bring in Harm Sorley. Knowing nothing of his history, she views him as a dangerous criminal who must be returned to prison. The trouble is, no one else wants him caught. Her fellow officers feel sorry for him and the local residents see him as a folk hero...until his ex-wife is murdered and there can be no doubt in anyone's mind that Harm Sorley isn't nearly as harmless as they first supposed.

McCrumb has been described as doing for Appalachia what Tony Hillerman has done for the Southwest and that's not far off the mark. Like Hillerman, McCrumb brings to life the culture and landscape of her setting in a way that makes them more like characters. There's a grace and lyric beauty to her prose, especially when the action leaves small-town Hamelin and enters the hills.

She also has the gift of balancing any number of complex subplots without ever once making the story seem complicated. Characters weave in and out of the storyline, fully realized, and the reader is gripped by their presence as much as by the main plotline. From city folk like the helpless Cobb, lost in the wilderness, to old hill folk such as Nora Bonesteel who has the "sight," all are brought effortlessly to life.

Much of McCrumb's work in these Appalachian novels is concerned with how the past encroaches upon and influences the present. In this novel the ghosts are both literal, with Katie Wyler, and figurative, and in the end we learn that the latter are the far more dangerous as the pasts of various characters finally catch up with them.

She Walks These Hills is a rich, gripping tapestry of a story, an intricate and thoughtful entertainment that I can't even begin to properly present with any fairness in the little space we have here. Genre readers might be familiar with McCrumb from her classic mystery set at an sf con, *Bimbos of the Death Sun*. No matter what your reaction to that book (readers seem to be equally divided in terms of whether or not they recognize themselves in the archetypical characters found in its pages), this new series gives us an author writing at the top of her form and you would be doing yourself a disservice if you gave it a pass.

Remake, by Connie Willis, Bantam Spectra, 1995, 192pp, $11.95 trade pb

Hollywood in the twenty-first century. The techniques for making movies are different, but otherwise

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little has changed. "Faces" are still desperate to get on screen, the deals go down without much respect to talent, and censorship (never referred to as such, of course) lives on.

Remake's protagonist is Tom, a college student paying his way by "fixing" already-made movies — in this case, removing all reference to the consumption of alcohol. It doesn't help that Tom loves the movies just the way they are. But he's become inured to how things are done now. It's all remakes and sequels, this time using digitized versions of popular actors in the starring roles — unless, of course, their trademark is in litigation and then any movie they've appeared in can't even be seen. So River Phoenix is starring in a remake of *Back to the Future*. A new version of *Phantom of the Opera* features Anthony Hopkins and Meg Ryan. And on it goes.

Tom's life changes when he meets Alis, a young woman new in town by way of Illinois, who wants to dance in the movies. The trouble is live actors aren't used anymore. It's all done with computers and why take a chance on a new face when you can use a proven commodity that's just waiting there on the digitized shelf?

Remake is part love story as we follow Alis's attempts to make her dreams come true and Tom's efforts to help her. But it's also a fascinating glimpse into how the film industry might well come to operate in less time than one might imagine. Much of the technology is already in place and the mind-set has long prevailed. Just take a look at what's being offered at your local cineplex — sequels, remakes, or copycat versions pretending to be fresh.

So it's a timely subject, but since it's Connie Willis at the authorial helm, one can be assured that fascinating though the background and speculation might be, characters and story remain at the forefront. You don't have to be a film buff to appreciate this short novel. Some of the sly asides might pass you by, but the heart of *Remake* is the timeless story of how we relate to one another and keep faith with our friends and ourselves. And in that, as she has proved so often in the past, Willis excels.

Material to be considered for review in this column should be sent to Charles de Lint, P.O. Box 9480, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1G 3V2.

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Edward Bryant appears all too rarely in our pages. His story, "The Country Mouse," in our March 1992 issue was his most recent. This time he contributes a dark and disturbing tale that shows him at his very best.

Flirting With Death

By Edward Bryant

LINDA PICKED UP THE PLASTIC vial again, turned it over and over in her hand, listening to the silence. She'd packed the container too full of capsules for there to be any rattle. That effect pleased her. Again she read the cautions on the label. Linda twisted the child-proof cap until both arrows lined up, tried to thumb the cap off, broke her nail instead. She set the vial down beside the sink a little too hard and rubbed the ragged rim of nail against her index finger. Linda started to reach for the emery board in the zippered case by the sink, then hesitated. Why bother?

If she was going to die, it didn't really matter if she looked perfect, though she suddenly remembered her mother's long-ago admonitions about clean underwear. She almost laughed out loud, though the sound that finally slipped between compressed lips sounded more to her own ears like a whimper.

And if she didn't die, there was no one to impress, so why bother? She remembered her mother's strong opinions again. Her mother had desired her

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to meet and marry a doctor. Linda didn't know at this point whether she wanted to laugh or to cry.

She gave the vial an impatient tap on the faux marble. The cap popped free and red capsules pattered across the sink. Several bounced off the toilet ring and into the electric blue water. Linda thought she could see them start immediately to expand like the gel-packed sponge dinosaurs she had once bought for her nephew's seventh birthday.

This was sordid. It took away even more from the mood, and her sense of resolve. Resignedly, she got down on her knees and picked up every capsule she could find. In the corner, three robust ants tried to make off with one of the capsules. She shook them free and scooted the trio toward the baseboard with a piece of Kleenex. Maybe they were depressed too. She thought about mutual pacts, this time couldn't stop herself from giggling, looked for the rest of the capsules. The ants wandered away into the corner. Linda flushed the toilet. The dry capsules went back into the vial and she replaced the cap with a positive click.

Another time, perhaps. She had enough capsules, even without the ones that had swirled down the toilet. If she were patient, she could even wait until the prescription was again refilled. She knew full well her doctor would do that.

But in the meantime...

Linda walked tiredly into the living room, flipped on the radio by the faded couch, heard the first notes of a love song she particularly hated, twisted the dial looking for a heavy metal station. Or rap. Or even country. She found none of those among the intermittent cascades of static. All that seemed to be on the air tonight were easy-listening stations with mushy ballads. She aimed the TV remote. *Like Water for Chocolate* was on HBO. Encore had Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*. And so it went. *Love Story* on TBS. She slapped the remote. The TV image dwindled into a dot and then vanished all too slowly.

If this was a message from God, it was a grotesque one.

And if it was divine punishment for even mulling the thought of suicide, then God was even more of a thug than Mark Twain had mocked.

Linda slipped a Nick Cave album into the CD player, cranked the volume only on the headphones out of deference to her downstairs neighbors, and lay back against the couch pillows.

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— and woke as she felt the bullet, rising toward her on a hot cushion of flame, starting to push toward the softest part of her eye, the membrane distending, the optic nerve shrieking, the pain and the sound rising to a crescendo. Linda blinked furiously, rubbed her eye, only half-noted the staccato reflections of rotating emergency lights crossing the faded rose plaster of her bedroom walls. An ambulance, she realized, orienting herself, the wail of a siren diminishing in the distance. She wondered who had died?

Certainly not her. Maybe no one.

She sat up, swinging her legs off the side of the bed, wincing at the sharp pain by the base of her skull. She must have slept completely wrong; the crick in her neck was evidence of that. Linda realized she didn't recall moving from the couch to her bedroom. Now her whole head was aching. The vial waited in the bathroom.

But when she went into the harsh fluorescent light of the lavatory, she let the faucet run for a whole minute, then used half a glass of the tepid water to wash down three aspirin.

In the living room she looked at the clock on the VCR. Half past nine. She had a long, long time until morning, and she didn't want to spend all those hours dreaming. That's why she put on a light cotton top, her denim skirt, and decided to take a walk. It was an atypically hot early October night and this early there should be plenty of people on the streets.

Although, whispered a small voice, maybe the darkness would hold a truly unexpected surprise. Perhaps a car would suddenly jump the curb, a wall would collapse, a hideously off-course airliner would try to use her street as an emergency landing strip. Maybe a man with a knife or a pistol would step from a dark alley. "Are you talking yourself out of this, or into it?" she muttered to herself.

Linda took her keys and a twenty dollar bill. She hesitated, then took the half-empty pack of Marlboros and a book of matches. When she swung open the door to leave, Mr. Claws screamed from the railing outside and bounded into her apartment.

She turned and headed for the kitchen, knowing exactly what Mr. Claws wanted. Mr. Claws was an alley scrapper, a bulky gray cat getting a little long in the fang. Linda had taken him to a vet the month before when it looked like the cat's left eye was well on the way to liquefying and dropping from its

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socket. The vet prescribed antibiotics and showed Linda how to clean the eye with a cotton ball and a solution of boric acid. Mr. Claws had recovered just fine. Both eyes seemed to work now, following squirrels and birds with endless patience when Linda watched him stalking.

Now he padded around the kitchen, grumbling and hissing, waiting for Linda to open a can. "Pressed chicken okay, Mr. Claws?" She took the package from the refrigerator, extracted a slice, then knelt to feed him. The big gray grabbed the meat from her fingers and shook his head as if trying to snap a mouse's neck. Linda touched the lumpy top of his head. Mr. Claws growled with the chicken still in his mouth and tried to take a swipe at her hand. "Living up to your name, kitty," said Linda, quickly withdrawing her fingers. "I'll leave the rest of the chicken in your dish. Suit you?"

She stood and rinsed her fingers in the sink. Mr. Claws happily attacked his evening treat. "Just have a good meal," said Linda. "I'll be back before you know it. This time use the litter box." She had reason to believe the cat was box-trained, though he sometimes used the Navajo rug in her living room just to be obnoxious.

From the doorway, she said, "You can earn your way tonight." The cat ignored her. "I'd really like it if you'll stay and sleep with me." The cat still didn't look up from his pressed chicken.

Propositioning a stray cat, she thought. Now that's pitiful. She left the apartment, locking the deadbolt behind her. As she descended the open stairwell, she realized it really was comforting tonight knowing there was something— someone — to come home to. Even if it was a flagrantly unfaithful big gray cat.

LINDA'S APARTMENT building was only half a block from Paradise Avenue, and the most immediate mile of Paradise held at least two dozen favored destinations for nighttime wanderers. She strode briskly, passing bars and music clubs, a twin cinema besieged with lines waiting for the final round of evening shows, and neon-bright restaurants.

At the corner of 18th Street, a red convertible stopped for the light. One among the four boys in the car yelled something at her. Another of the kids whistled.

Linda hadn't been able to decipher what the one boy had called out, so

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she gave him the benefit of a doubt. "I'm as old as your mother," she said back.

The boy grinned. "You don't look like her."

Linda found it hard not to smile back. The light changed as she stepped into the crosswalk and she quickened her pace.

"Last chance," called the boy.

Probably, she thought, stepping onto the opposite curb. My last chance. No doubt. She let the words cool in her mind. The convertible roared away, trailing the squeal of rubber and a chime of laughter.

The next block was less populated by passersby and even less well-lit. There was a movie rental store called Wings Video. She wondered if they carried copies of *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*. Just why *am* I out here? Linda thought. Just going for a walk. Just clearing her head. Not looking for anything. Not looking for anyone.

Linda knew she was coming up on a club called High Beam. The next block would be busier. She was paying attention to her surroundings, but still was surprised when a man's voice came out of the darkened alley beside High Beam.

"Linda?" She heard the baritone, knew it was male. Broke her stride, startled. Hesitated, knowing even as she peered into the darkness she should be sprinting for light and other people. Safety. "It is you, isn't it, Linda?" The man stepped forward and his shape resolved in the light on the sidewalk.

She involuntarily took a step back. He didn't look familiar. He was taller than she, though most men were. Maybe six feet. She took in the shaggy collar-length hair, blond streaked with something darker. He smiled and there was a white glistening of teeth. His eyes were dark; that's all she could tell.

"Yes?" she said. "Do I know you?"

"We know each other," he said. "We've had some long conversations."

She instantly thought back over every crank call she'd ever gotten. Most of them were hang-ups. She never allowed obscene callers to hang on the line. She refused to feed their hunger.

"I think you're mistaken," she said uncertainly. "We don't know each other. But how do you know my name?"

The man stepped farther into the light. Linda took another step back to compensate. She believed she knew something about body language; this man seemed to offer no threat.

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"Linda's a lovely name," he said. She could see his lips curve in a smile. "You know the Spanish meaning? Beautiful."

"I think it's more like just 'pretty,'" she found herself saying.

The man shook his head emphatically. "Beautiful," he repeated. His smile widened. "Do you know the old High German?"

She shook her head.

"Over there it means serpent. No connotation of something ugly or scaly. Mythic. The suggestion is one of strength, flexibility, power."

She watched him closely, waiting to see if he was going to turn into some sort of berserk maniac.

"You're wondering if I'm some sort of serial killer," said the man.

Linda didn't shake her head. The thought had occurred to her, though she knew rationally that he was probably just an articulate drunk, or perhaps one of the slightly deranged street people who mixed among the upscale tourists on Paradise Avenue. He wore jeans with no visibly worn patches or holes. His western shirt looked pressed. His black leather jacket didn't appear scuffed, and held no adornment other than a moth-shaped pin on the collar. Then she thought, who knows what one looks like? He could be a serial killer. He could have slaughtered hundreds. How do you tell, save by weighing deeds?

"Well maybe I am," he said. "But I'm off-duty for a while. My name is Todd." He extended his hand.

She took it tentatively at first. His hand was much larger than hers, but his grip was firm and warm without being intimidating. She admitted surprise to herself that he didn't offer either the crushing grip or the sensitively limp gesture she was accustomed to from men. There was heat in his hand, and it seemed to flow like a live electric current into her own fingers. She was aware, as she withdrew her hand, that their touching had lasted perhaps a second longer than it should. By whose standards? the rebellious little voice in her head said, and then laughed softly. She ordinarily gauged these things by what felt right. This most assuredly had, and that surprised her.

"I bewilder you," Todd said, half a question, half a statement. "All those questions in your head will get answers." He cocked his head to one side, looking down at her, into her eyes. The shadows were too dark; she still couldn't tell what color *his* eyes were. "In the meantime, I'm going to ask you out for a drink. And how about going dancing later?"

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"I don't dance," she said automatically.

He laughed. "Don't? Not can't? I don't think you've been dancing in a while, but I'll bet you could if you decided that was what you wanted."

"Not in a while," Linda conceded. "I can."

"Then you should." Todd turned and gestured down Paradise. "Let's just see what happens."

Linda felt a pang of caution as she looked at the darkness pooling farther down the block. "Maybe we should try High Beam."

"My thought exactly," said the man. Linda wondered how old he really was. He looked about Linda's age. Forty. Perhaps a little older. Maybe a little younger. It was hard to tell.

"You've got nice hair," he said suddenly.

She involuntarily reached back, touching her hair with the fingers of her right hand. "It's got snow in it," she heard herself saying. Her mother had said that same thing about her own hair when the glossy black had so quickly started to gray.

"Such tension," Todd said. "The contrast, the lightness playing against the dark, that's exciting." He sounded serious.

"Smooth talker," said Linda. "You use that line on all of us?"

"Actually, no." Todd sounded even more serious. "Usually I need say nothing at all."

She looked at him appraisingly. "Pretty self-confident, aren't you?"

He smiled back at her; *ingenuous*, she thought. "A drink?" he said. "A dance?"

"A deal," Linda said, wondering momentarily why she was saying this, but knowing on another level why. "A drink. And maybe, *maybe* a dance."

Just inside High Beam, a doorman didn't ask for a cover charge, but he did check Linda's driver's license.

"Charming," she said. She couldn't remember the last time that had happened.

High Beam was an old dance club apparently now fallen on difficult times. The first thing Linda thought as Todd and she walked into the cavernous interior was, maybe they should rename it Low Beam? It hadn't looked this big from the outside. The dance floor stretched back farther than she could accurately gauge in the darkness. It looked as though the walls had once been thickly populated with neon decor. Now only the occasional tube

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flickered and buzzed fitfully. There were more purples than anything else, abstract shapes, a few red forms that could have been flames or perhaps the teeth of a saw, part of a green palm thatch, the crest of a bright blue wave. In all the corners at ceiling level, pairs of spotlights swept back and forth in tandem, like headlights rounding a turn. A fog generator coughed out a mist that softened the headlight glare, giving momentary form to the high beam probe.

Most of the nearby light seemed to come from a huge and elaborate CD jukebox in the near corner. A myriad of lights, red, blue, white, chased themselves along all the hard chromed edges of the machine. Music boomed from speakers mounted around the dance floor.

Linda found her body already beginning to yield treacherously to the beat of the music. She swayed with the fierce chords. The up-tempo rocker made the thick, smoky air vibrate. She took a deep breath. "Who is this?" She had to speak close to Todd's ear.

He shrugged. "I think it's a group called Manichee." At least that's what she thought she heard him say.

Something suddenly snapped into focus as she stared over to the left, at the neon-limned bar and the stools spaced in front of it. The Manichee piece ended in a minor-key crescendo and the echoes diminished and were gone.

"There's no one here," said Linda.

Todd followed her stare. "That would seem to be the case."

"I wouldn't even expect us to be the only customers," she said, still looking at the deserted bar. "No one would leave all that untended." Linda gestured toward the glittering rows of bottles.

"'Probably just getting some re-stock out of the storeroom," said Todd.

"This is strange." Linda suddenly felt as though she didn't want to get any closer to the bar. She turned. "Where's the doorman?"

"Maybe," said Todd, "he's a psychopath. And the people who were here are all lying on the floor back in the storeroom. All tied up."

"I really don't want to walk into a robbery." A chill raced along Linda's neck.

"Maybe not just a robbery." Todd looked serious. "Perhaps they're all back there in the storeroom on their bellies on the floor with some guy putting a bullet through the back of each of their heads."

Linda clapped a hand to her mouth, forced herself to take it away. She steadied herself. "Not funny," she said.

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"No," he said. "It's not."

"We've got a choice," said Linda. "We could call the police, or we can get out of here."

"Or we can dance." Todd touched her shoulder lightly. She could feel the heat of his fingers again.

It was a challenge, she realized. A test of nerve.

He stepped closer to her and said, "The people really are back somewhere getting stock. Or maybe *taking stock*. Or getting laid. I'm sure of it. I don't think this place has much of a clientele, even on the best of nights. They're perfectly safe. So are we." He took his hand away from her shoulder. "Now. Music. What would you like to hear?"

"What I'd like and what this fancy machine can play are probably a few miles apart."

The song started then, and the opening chords rocked her back on her heels. "I'll be damned," she said, sure Todd couldn't hear her now. The volume lowered a notch or two.

"Is this something you can live with?" said Todd.

It was, in fact, the song she'd been thinking of. Not by the King, true; and a slightly slower tempo than she was used to, but still a beautiful rendition. Hoyt Axton's mommy's big hit, sung by an unknown voice that sent shivers through her abdomen.

Since my baby left me... She could sing right along with the words. The song was "Heartbreak Hotel."

He took her hands in his. "Let's dance..."

They did, and he was very good. And after the first chorus of "Heartbreak Hotel," so was she. It wasn't the dancing she had to reaccustom herself to. It was holding a partner in her arms. She felt strangely shy. That feeling went away quickly. Linda found herself not so decorously distant from Todd. It felt like a gravitational thing. They moved around the dance floor together, gradually closer. She wasn't aware of the process so much as she realized, when the song ended, that they were now very close indeed.

The next song was another familiar tune with an unfamiliar arrangement; this time, bluesy, smoky. "Give me a break," she said.

He looked down at her. "Pardon?"

Linda said, "The jukebox is playing 'Lonely Women Make Good Lovers.'"

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"You like the country version better?"

"That's not the point," said Linda. "It's a great dance tune. It's also an article of faith for cracker bubbas on the make in every sleazy dive."

"Are you saying it's sexist?" said Todd, drawing her very close now, so that her head tucked up close to his chin.

She nodded. "That's about it."

He nodded too, slowly. "I'm a great student of country," Todd said. "I'm a great student of most things," he added modestly, cutting the effect with a smile Linda could feel against her temple. His lips moved like silk. His voice was a little muffled. He moved his mouth away just enough to articulate. "Lonely women are a cliché. But so are lonely men. And I'd rather deal with lonely women any day."

"I'm sure," said Linda.

"No, really. Guys have their own cliché. Lonely men whimper and bitch a lot more than women. Women ignore it or do what they have to do to get through it. Men start acting like babies, yapping and whining and carrying on like there's nobody's business except their own."

Linda felt the warmth of his right hand against the small of her back. Felt the heat of his palm and fingers move a little to the side, resting on the curve of her hip, then back to the center. "Are you some kind of therapist?" she said.

"Nope," said Todd.

"Then what are you?"

"I told you before."

She had to think for a few seconds. It was easier now not to think, but just to dance and move as though the music was never going to end. "The..." She wasn't sure if she should be keeping her voice light. "The serial killer thing." He nodded, jaw seeming to generate a static charge as it rubbed against her hair. "You weren't kidding," she said.

"I said I was off-duty," said Todd. "You can trust me on that."

She knew she could trust him. She also knew she could bring her knee up into his groin, put stiffened fingers into his throat, run for the door, risk hearing his tortured breath and stumbling footsteps behind her. Linda made her decision without really thinking about it. She remembered a time once when she had made certain decisions based on feeling — no, more on other intangibles that rarely played her false. This time, after a very long time of ignoring the issue, Linda opted for trust.

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"Okay," she said. "Now what do you want to do?"

"I'd like us to go back to your apartment," said Todd. "I'd like to see your cat."

"You know entirely too much," said Linda. "Are you a detective too?"

"I just know a lot." The music ended. He gave her a hug, drew away, spread his hands. "You know?"

"No," she said. "I don't know. This is stupid. I'm going to hate myself in the morning." If I'm alive in the morning, she said silently.

"I don't think you'll hate yourself." Todd sounded serious. "I'm pretty sure of it."

"I don't take strange men home from bars," she said.

"I know that," said Todd.

"I don't go to bed with people I barely know," she said. Did I actually say that? she said to herself.

"I know that," said Todd.

"I'm not easy," she said aloud. I'm not, she repeated silently.

"I know that."

"I'm not going to do anything with you."

"I know that." His face was close to hers.

"But you can come up for some coffee."

Todd smiled with what looked to Linda like innocent pleasure. Sure, she thought. He's very, very good. And then she wondered, who was being the most truthful in this strange interchange?

"I don't do floors and windows," she said.

"I know that too." He reached for her hand, drew her gently but firmly toward the door of the High Beam. She noticed that the doorman still was not in evidence. She hadn't seen him since they'd entered the club.

"Is there anything at all you don't know?" Linda said.

For the first time, she detected a touch of something taut in his voice. Fatigue? Or perhaps it was something like wistfulness. "There are things," he said. "And wondering about them keeps me from going...stir-crazy with boredom."

She squeezed his fingers.

"And not just things," Todd said. "People, sometimes. You."

They left the High Beam. She sensed the headlights snapping out. Behind them, she heard the jukebox start to belt out a polka version of "Are You Lonesome Tonight?"

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Paradise Avenue was deserted.

"Where is everybody?" said Linda. She had never seen the street completely without pedestrians.

"Back at the club," said Todd. "That storeroom where everybody's lying on their bellies? It's *big*."

"You're sick," she said.

He nodded.

They walked a while in silence. "Do you live around here?" Linda said.

"Just visiting," said Todd.

"Be here for long?"

"I've only got so much energy," he said. "And only so much time."

She said, "I guess you're being honest."

He nodded. "I am."

They got to her street. Linda took his arm and turned him away from the avenue. As they walked beneath the canopies of oak and elm just starting to turn with the autumn, Todd said, "I find this very beautiful."

"It's my favorite season." Linda wanted this part of the walk home to last forever. She knew exactly how many steps there were between the warm pools of light from the old streetlamps. A breeze started to rise, rattling the leaves overhead like dry bones.

"We've something in common," said Todd. "The fall's my favorite too."

"Is that all we've got in common?" She regretted the words as they were leaving her lips. She hated sounding fatuous. Especially she hated sounding shallow.

He seemed to take the question seriously. "There is more," he said. He didn't elaborate. She didn't press.

Another two pools of light, the quality of illumination seeming to flicker as wind-tossed branches swept in front of the electric lights. Linda shivered in the rising wind. Todd took off his leather jacket and draped it around her shoulders.

"We're almost there," she said. "Thanks."

And then they *were* there, and climbing the outside steps to the second floor landing. Even with Todd's jacket around her, Linda shivered as she keyed the deadbolt, then turned the other key in the latch.

Inside, she luxuriated for a moment in the warmth. She shrugged off the

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leather jacket and reached for the light switch. Then she felt Todd's fingers lightly on her wrist. He stood behind her, took the jacket from her left hand. Linda heard leather sigh to the floor.

"The light is for later," said Todd.

"And the coffee?"

"For later," he said.

Linda suddenly wished she had taken time to file her broken nail. She knew he was standing close, close behind her. The warmth on the back of her head was his breath. It smelled a bit like cloves and orange peel. The small hairs on the back of her neck prickled, the graying hair above seemed to crackle with electricity. He could not be closer without touching.

Linda felt his hands alight on her shoulders, fingers cupping those shoulders, two spots of radiant heat. She knew she was acting now without thinking as she leaned back against him, adjusting her body to accommodate his. Her hips touched his thighs; she felt the length of his legs against the backs of hers. The top of her head tucked beneath his chin. Her back relaxed.

"My shoulder blades are sharp," she said.

"I like them that way," Todd said, his voice huskier than it had been.

"Is that a kind of serial killer thing?" Linda wasn't sure whether she said that aloud or not. But she did know she was smiling. And when Todd took his right hand from her shoulder and let his fingers caress the line of her jaw and then brush across her lips, she gently took one finger into her mouth.

They stood like that a long, long while as the room seemed to get warmer. Linda felt his breath move down the back of her head to her neck, felt Todd's mouth lightly touch the nape of her neck, felt the quick, hot dart of tongue against her skin.

She thought she cried out. At first just a little, and later, quite a lot. His left arm encircled her front, his hand cupping her right breast without quite touching it.

"Tease," she said, from around his finger. Linda reached up and pushed the hand against her breast.

"Oh, no," he said. "I wouldn't want you to think I'm a tease."

"Then don't be." She felt his fingers slide between the buttons of her top. She wondered if he was as surprised as she how hard her nipple had become. And how sensitive.

"I don't do this."

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Todd smiled against her hair.

That was the last silly thing she remembered saying.

There were some things she did remember.

Linda remembered when they first were there in her big comfortable bed, the bed in which two people had never slept together. The bed which she had bought after Jack died. She handed Todd the small packet which he took, then lifted up to examine in the candlelight.

"It's old," she said apologetically. "I never expected an occasion to use it."

He began laughing. "I'm safer than you can imagine," he said.

Linda said, "Indulge me."

But what she remembered most were the memories that came back later, a kind of overlay of the past on the present, though the past was so long ago, Linda thought she had buried it thoroughly.

The memories started to flood back with every single thing Todd did to her.

And when she climaxed, letting the heat and sheer sensation claim her as she had not experienced in nearly two decades, Linda began to cry. Todd held her, touching her hair and her skin, comforting her when she wanted comfort, giving her silence when she craved a temporary wall of privacy, while she felt the tears well from her eyes and leave trails of salt across her lips.

"I don't do this," she finally said in a low voice. I don't come and I don't cry, not like this, she said inside her head.

"I know that," he said, and this time she knew he really did, though she honestly did not know how he could have come by that knowledge.

So she asked him.

And after he held her for a long, long time even tighter and closer, and after he kissed her a few more times, he told her. After a fashion.

"You asked how I knew you," said Todd. "Back at the beginning, on the street by the club."

"You said we'd talked."

He was sitting up now, back against the headboard, knees drawn up. "And I told the truth." Linda leaned against him, wrapped her arms around his knees. "Do you have some idea of our meeting?"

She nodded. "I'm not stupid."

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"But you have been — " He seemed to fumble for words. "You've been frozen. In a kind of prison cell."

"I had to protect myself," she said. "Thanks to you."

Todd looked away. "I can't be ashamed. And I feel no guilt. I'm not here because I think I owe you. I'm not," he said, voice rising. She reached and touched his face. He seemed to relax just a little.

"We've been more than just acquaintances," said Linda. "I suppose it was inevitable we become lovers."

"No." Todd shook his head. "It was not in any way predestined that we do this." He hesitated. "But I wanted us to."

"And I guess maybe I did too," Linda said slowly. "Jack, Mom, all the others you came to embrace. My nephew — he was only seven, you son of a bitch. I argued, remember? I screamed and cried and begged. I used logic and I tried bargaining." In her mind's eye, what she saw were the sick-beds and the hospital wards and the nursing homes and the funeral parlors. She smelled the cloying odors of farewell, and again tasted the precious, increasingly short supply of tears.

"I'm not easy," said Todd.

"Don't I know it." Linda leaned closer to kiss him, the touch long and lingering on his lips, the taste a little bitter. "What now?"

Todd looked away, then back, meeting her eyes. "Morning. I've got places to go." He smiled. "People to meet. You know."

"Yes." She nodded. "I believe I do. But things between us aren't the same."

Todd sighed. "Nope, they're not."

"Morning's a while yet," said Linda. "Kiss me a few more times."

"I will do that," Todd said. And he did even more.

They stood in the open doorway of Linda's apartment. The eastern sky above the city's skyline lightened.

"Be honest," she said.

"I'm *always* honest," he answered, "though sometimes people willfully misunderstand me."

"Be honest," she said again.

"All right," he said. "Okay. Don't badger me." He took a deep breath, looked her in the eye. His gaze didn't waver.

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"You're stalling." She surprised herself that she could manage the tiniest of smiles.

He acknowledged it, smiling himself, touching her lips lightly with his right index finger, passing it across her mouth, pausing when he encountered the moist tip of her tongue just barely extending beyond those soft lips. "Very good," he said. "You've regained so much."

"But too late," she whispered.

Todd shrugged, stepped closer to her, now within an intimate radius. "I think I could grow to love you." He sounded a little surprised with himself as he passed the flat of his hand across her eyes. For just a moment, the blackest of darknesses blotted her vision. Then the soft light of the approaching new morning returned. "Too late." This time he really did laugh. "I do love you."

Linda thought about that. She stared boldly into the deep, dark wells of his eyes. "But you're leaving me."

"For a while." He spread his hands as though helpless. "I know what that sounds like."

"Should I wait?" said Linda, wondering what answer he'd choose.

No hesitation, but his smile widened. "Those pills in the bathroom? Use them for headaches, or give 'em to the ants. Trust me to catch up with you."

"I can do that."

"Honest," he said. "I'll come again." The smile grew even further. "And so will you." He winked.

He brushed his lips against hers. She felt the fire. Linda believed him. And knew that she was capable of waiting until that unspecified future moment.

There was some disturbance at their feet. Todd glanced down at Mr. Claws, who was glaring balefully up at them both, no doubt impatient for his pressed chicken.

"Nice kitty," said Todd. "What a great old cat."

"Don't even think it," said Linda. "He's with me."

This time Todd laughed out loud. "I can live with that." He offered her a final kiss. "And he can live with you. For now." He coughed. "Sorry. That's not too comforting."

"You've never been a comfort," she said.

Todd looked for a moment as if he was deciding whether to say something. Decided. "Listen, what you said before about being too late?" He

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shook his head. "I just want you to know, you've got some time. I can't tell you how much. It'd be cheating, you know?" The lines of fatigue dropped away from around his mouth as he smiled. "Time is something to use well, okay?" Finger to his lips, kiss transferred to her lips, and then he turned and descended the stairs. The sound of his steps echoed and dissipated and was gone.

Light sleeted across the city's horizon.

Mr. Claws gurgled in his thick, furry throat.

"Okay," said Linda. "Breakfast."

Later, in the bathroom, she set one of the red capsules from the vial down in the corner for the ants to carry away. If they wished. The rest she placed deep in the medicine cabinet where they would not get in the way.

"I suspect Dr. Kervorkian had a hand in this."

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Since Patricia Matthews last appearance in F&SF *(February, 1987), she has published more than ten novels. The most recent she wrote in collaboration with her husband, Clayton Matthews. These are a series of mystery novels published by Severn House.*

Patricia writes that the inspiration for "Goatman" comes from a Maryland newspaper article. The article "was about a local variation of Bigfoot, a mysterious 'goatman' who had supposedly been seen for years by rural locals." In Patricia's hands, a rural tall tale becomes something wonderful, mysterious and strange.

Goatman

By Patricia Matthews

AS MOIRA CAME TO THE midpoint of her afternoon walk, the small unpainted cabin of Miss Bessie Rhode, the old woman spoke to her for the first time.

Leaning over the bare, wind-finished boards of her front yard fence, looking for all the world like a scrap of gray cloth hung to dry, the woman uttered the words grudgingly, "Hello, Missy."

Moira supposed that she should feel some sort of triumph at this small victory, but truthfully, she didn't really care. Her brother, Victor, had warned her that the natives would not accept her, and that she shouldn't expect any kind of a welcome if she insisted on intruding her presence into the God-forsaken place; but what he couldn't seem to realize was that this didn't matter. In fact, such a situation was desirable to her, for she wanted nothing so much as to be left alone.

However, it wasn't in her to be really rude, and so she nodded at the other woman's words, and answered with sparse words of her own. "Hello."

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As far as she was concerned, this was the end of it. She continued moving up the road, her feet raising the dry dust into the gusts of wind that swooped down from the treetops, and rattled the dry brush along the roadside; but by the way the old woman looked at her, she knew that the episode was not finished.

Despite a vague feeling of disquiet, she stopped. What could this old woman have to say to her? For three weeks Moira had been walking past the cabin every afternoon. Why now was the woman speaking to her?

Miss Rhode cleared her throat. The sound was as dry as her wrinkled face. "I thought you ought to know," she said, fixing Moira with her bright, black eyes. "You being a woman all alone up there, you have a right to know."

Moira found herself coming closer, as the wind blew Miss Rhode's words off into the garden beside the house.

"What?" Moira said. "What should I know?"

"...Goatman," said the old woman, and Moira came closer still. Had she heard what she thought she had heard? "What?" she asked again.

"It's Goatman," said the old woman, snapping out the words. "He's back again. Been seen around Clarence Hooker's place, and killed a hound up at Carter's. You'd best keep your doors and windows locked, and keep that dog of yours close to the house."

Moira looked down the road in the direction in which Tray had gone running after the rabbit they had startled in the middle of the road.

"Do you have a gun?"

Wordlessly Moira shook her head, and felt the wind wrap her hair around her throat and across her cheeks.

"It wouldn't hurt none to have one," said Miss Rhode, staring fixedly into Moira's eyes. "Just wanted to tell you. Seeing as how you're a woman alone."

Why did she keep harping on that? "You're alone, too," Moira said somewhat accusingly.

What might have been amusement flickered in the old woman's eyes. "That's a different thing," she said, turning away. "I'm an old woman, and I'm no city-folk. I can take care of myself."

Meaning I can't, I suppose, thought Moira, feeling a flash of annoyance. "Well, thanks for the warning," she called in what she intended to be a sarcastic tone, but the old woman was already walking toward the house, and in a moment, Moira was left alone in the road.

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* * *

By suppertime, the wind had not lessened, and Moira, preparing her evening meal at the sink in front of the window, could see the tops of the trees at the edge of the clearing, moving against the fading blue of the sky. It was going to be a beautiful, wild night, and for the first time in months, she felt a kind of excitement stirring inside her.

She could feel the warmth of the wood stove behind her, and she turned from the window to face the room. She loved the interior of the one-room cabin. It was simple, and functional, much as it had been when her great-aunt, Ida, had lived here. Victor might scoff at it, as indeed he had, but it satisfied some need in her.

The day after she moved into the cabin, her brother, Victor, had come to see her.

"It looks like something out of one of those awful old movies," Victor said, looking very much out of place in his beige sports outfit, which Moira was certain had been advertised as the latest thing in country wear. He posed in the doorway, looking fastidious and elegant, and suddenly she felt as tired of him as she was of all the rest of the polished, sophisticated, artificial people she had come here to escape.

"You'll be back within a week." His attractive, triangular smile took the sting from his words. "This place is primitive, Moira. A pump! I can't believe it! And where is the john?"

"In back of the cabin." She had to smile at his very real horror.

He struck his forehead with the back of his hand. "A Chic Sale! Now I know you're out of your mind!"

A stricken look flashed across his mobile face, and Moira went to him and took his hand, exerting a gentle pressure. "Victor, it's all right. I can talk about it now. I can talk about nervous breakdowns, mental illness." She smiled wryly. "In fact, for nine months, it seems I've talked of little else."

And that's the truth, she thought. In her sessions with Dr. Speegler, she had finally been able to bring it all out; all the bitterness, all the repressed love and hidden hatred that she had felt for her husband, Jason. Dr. Speegler had helped her see that her anger was a natural thing. She had felt betrayed, which was only natural, since in the very act of marrying her, Jason had betrayed her.

She had married Jason believing he was everything she had ever dreamed of; handsome, clever, sure of himself. The fact that he attempted no physical

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liberties with her before marriage, she put down to his self-control, his concern for her inexperience. But, after the wedding...She drew a shuddering breath. She could think of it now, even talk about it, but the thought still brought pain. It all came down to one hurtful, unalterable fact; Jason was not able to physically love a woman. That portion of his life was reserved for other men.

No purpose would be served by going over it again; the recrimination, the terrible, wounded silences, the soul and mind-ripping cry of, why? Why did you marry me?

Dr. Speegler had helped her understand it, and deal with it, and now she needed peace, peace and quiet, and isolation, so that she could learn to live with it.

She felt the touch of Victor's hand on her arm. "Moira, are you sure you'll be all right alone? It's like the end of the Earth out here, and the cabin's falling apart. Nobody has lived here since Aunt Ida died."

She smiled, and touched his face. "Dear Victor. Of course. I've always loved it here, you know that. Besides, I have Tray for company."

Of course he had gone away still not understanding, for how could she have explained the appeal that this primitive simplicity had for her. She knew that in his own, rather unsteady way, her brother loved her and worried about her, and she appreciated his caring; but she needed to, had to, be alone just now.

Supper over, and the dishes put away, she put more wood into the Franklin stove, turned up the flame on the kerosene lamp, and settled, with a book, into the old rocker. Tray lay at her feet, rump turned to the heat of the stove, drowsing.

The wind seemed stronger now that darkness had fallen, and Moira was conscious of thumps and scratching sounds, as branches and twigs were blown against the walls of the cabin. She tried to immerse herself in her book, but she found the sounds distracting.

Up until now, she had felt no fear of staying in the cabin alone. Tray was a good watch dog, and somehow it had never occurred to her that there was any reason to be afraid.

Tonight, however, she felt a touch of uneasiness. The sounds of the wind and brush sounded disturbingly like someone, or something, was trying to get into the cabin, and the words of the old woman kept coming back to her.

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"Goatman." Who or what was he? Miss Rhode had seemed to assume that she would know. He must be a piece of local legend. Something that everyone in this part of the country knew about. Everyone but her, one of the "city-folk."

She let the book fall to her lap, bemused by the mystery of the name. The old woman had said that she should protect herself, but against what? What kind of danger did this Goatman represent?

She was started from her reverie by Tray's low growl, and found herself sitting upright, grasping the arms of the rocker. Tray was still at her feet, but the hair around his heavy neck was raised, and the low growl continued to rise in his throat.

"What is it, boy? What is it?" she whispered.

Then she noticed the knob on the front door. Slowly, it was moving; turning back and forth. The simple movement was singularly frightening. She felt the hair on her own neck rise, and Tray, thrusting forward with powerful legs, threw himself at the door, barking furiously.

Moira, in her chair, found herself powerless to move. In a few moments, Tray's barks faded to whines, as he paced back and forth before the door, and Moira could see that the knob was no longer moving.

She let out the breath she had not realized that she had been holding, and called to Tray. He came to her side, whining and twisting his body. He wanted her to open the door, to let him go after whoever or whatever had been standing on the other side. She quieted him with words and pats, and in a little while, he seemed to have forgotten their visitor. She wished that it was as easy to quiet her own mind.

The morning sun shone on a world of wind-cleared beauty. The sky was dazzling, and the air bore the crisp bite of the approaching winter.

The meadow was dotted with little piles of debris, scattered by the wind, but Moira could not see that there had been any real damage done.

With Tray at her side, she walked around the cabin, looking in the soft, turned earth of the flower beds for some sign of last night's visitor.

Near the side window, she found tracks, but she was unable to identify them. They were vaguely oval in shape, blurred by the wind-blown dust. There were only two of them, but then she supposed, if it had been an animal, the creature could have stood with his hind feet on the hard ground beyond the narrow border of soft earth.

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The placement of the tracks made it look as if the creature had stood just outside the window, looking in.

Moira repressed a shudder, and tried to put the thought of the turning door knob out of her mind.

Tray sniffed at the footprints and whined nervously. She took him by the collar and let him into the house, where she removed a shoebox from the clothes closet, then took it outside and carefully placed it over the prints; pushing the edges of the box firmly into the soft earth.

After her morning tasks were finished, Moira found herself restless. She did not feel like doing any of the things that normally occupied her time. She recognized the restlessness as unusual, for up until now, she had been content to drift through the days, resting, dreaming, doing nothing.

It was, she told herself, the fault of the old woman, Miss Rhode, and her Goatman. That, and the wind. Well, since she couldn't get the matter out of her mind, perhaps she could find some information about Goatman. If Miss Rhode knew about him, surely other people did, too.

Dulcimer, the nearest town, had a population of 1,500 people. After picking up some needed supplies, Moira parked her car in front of the old, ivy-covered brick library, leaving Tray inside the car with the windows cracked.

Nelly Fairchild, the middle-aged librarian, was very friendly. Moira hesitated only slightly before asking her if the library had any information on a "Goatman."

"Goatman? Why, I haven't heard that name in years." Mrs. Fairchild smiled, and for an instant, Moira could see the pretty young woman who had been, underneath the rather plain middle-aged woman that she was.

"Why, my old Grandma used to scare me with stories about Goatman, when I was child. I used to have nightmares about him, all hairy and goat-smelling, with burning red eyes." She moved her shoulders in a brief, shuddery motion.

Moira was conscious of a keen disappointment. Was that all Goatman was, a bogeyman for children?

"A neighbor of mine mentioned him," she said, hesitantly. "She seemed to think that there might be some sort of danger..."

"Oh, that's right, you live out at the old Dearborne place." Mrs. Fairchild smiled. "Well, out there in the country, the people still believe in the old legends. They have stories that you wouldn't believe.

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"Now, let's see. There was an article, just last fall, in one of the big papers. Some writer came out here and talked to people..."

She turned away from Moira and walked to the back of the room, where she pulled out a large drawer from a tall, dark cabinet.

"Here it is." She unfolded a yellowing paper, and pointed to an article on one of the inside pages. Moira took the paper and held it to the light. Conscious of the smell of the dust, and of Mrs. Fairchild's watchful appraisal, she read:

"Baltimore, Maryland, Aug. 25, 1974: The people who live in the deep forest find it easy to believe in things that city dwellers scoff at. Take the case of Goatman, a very real entity to the folk who live in Prince Georges County, Maryland, a secluded land where myths still live.

"Last week, Toller, a blue tick hound belonging to Bill Wheeler, was found horribly mutilated at the edge of the Wheeler property, which adjoins the forest. Old Toller is only one of the five dogs whose deaths are credited to the mysterious creature known as Goatman.

"What does Goatman look like? The accounts vary considerably. Some say he's about the size of a man, with legs like a goat, and the torso, head and arms of a man. Others say that sometimes he walks upright, and sometimes on all fours, and is entirely covered with long hair.

"Some say that Goatman *is* a man, or least he once was a man. A scientist at the nearby Agricultural Center, who has experimented on goats, believes that this man went mad, and ran away to live in a hut in the woods.

"At any rate, whatever Goatman looks like, if you have occasion to go walking in the woods around Prince Georges County, you had better walk softly, carry a big stick, and maybe a bag of garlic around your neck."

MOIRA ROLLED the images over in her mind. Of course the stories had to be apocryphal, but the concept was intriguing; and here, where the forest loomed and houses could be a mile or more apart, easy to accept. She had always felt that forests were magical, possessed of a life not visible to ordinary humans. Standing beneath a great tree, listening to the wind whisper in its branches, how could you not feel that the tree had a life, a spirit, a soul?

Forests and woods had always fueled imagination. Perhaps it was a human response to that which reminded them of their old connection with

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the earth and nature, a connection which modern life had worn so thin. But she was getting fanciful. Time to check out her books and get back to the car before Tray became too impatient.

The setting sun was washing the meadow with color when Moira drove in the yard before the cabin. Everything — trees, grass, stones — was bathed in a heavy, amber light. The beauty of it made tears come to her eyes.

She unloaded the groceries, fed Tray, and fixed a hearty meal for herself. For some reason she felt unaccountably hungry.

After her meal, drowsy from the food and the warmth of the fire, she could not keep her mind on the book in her lap. Half-sleeping, her mind pondered the puzzle of Goatman. Was he simply a woodsy version of the bogeyman — as Mrs. Fairchild seemed to think — a local variation of Bigfoot, frightening people on lonely farms, or something much, much older?

Her book dropped to the floor, temporarily rousing her, and early though it was, she crawled into her bed, beneath the cozy, brightly colored quilts, into the soft arms of the old feather mattress, and was soon deeply asleep, Tray lying in his usual place beside the bed.

Sometime during the night, she felt herself being drawn from the warm arms of sleep by a sound. Up her consciousness came, borne on the thread of melody, a strange tune, but not unpleasant; and then sleep would claim her, and snatches of dreams, until the sound would call her up again. She felt herself rise and fall as if she was being borne on a large, warm wave, until she was jolted into full wakefulness by Tray's echoing bark, and the sounds of his claws on the wooden floor.

She sat up abruptly, her hair falling over her eyes, to find her heart pounding. She could see the outline of Tray's body as he strained against the door, barking furiously.

Feeling out of focus and confused, Moira moved to Tray's side. In the moonlight, she could see him looking up at her, beseeching her to let him out to take care of this intruder on their nighttime quiet.

Moira put a hand on his bristling neck. "Shh, boy. Shh." Apprehensively, she crept to the window, and peered out onto the meadow, gilded by the light of the full moon, rising just above the trees. Was that a shadow, there, toward the front of the cabin? She shivered, her feet chilled by the cold boards of the floor. Should she let Tray out? Let him chase away whatever

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was out there, or should she keep him here, by her side?

Tray was growing frantic. She could feel his eagerness to be out there, his need to confront what he considered his enemy. Almost unwillingly, Moira reached for the bolt, and drew it back. The door was hardly open when Tray squeezed through, and burst into the yard.

As soon as he was out of the door, she regretted her decision. Barring the door behind him, she leaned against it, listening to the sound of his voice growling and barking, expecting to hear the sound dwindle as he and quarry fled for the trees at the edge of the meadow. But the sound did not dwindle, it stayed close to the cabin.

Ears straining, she could hear a scrabbling, a scuffling. Whatever it was, it was not running. It was standing its ground.

Filled with misgivings, she rushed to the one window, but it was facing the wrong way.

Still the terrible growling and scuffling; then Tray came into view, backing away from something, a dark shape that stood upright; no, it walked on all fours. She strained to see, but the shape seemed to change before her very eyes. Then the figure disappeared from view, and appeared to be moving away from the cabin, as Tray's barks and growls grew fainter. Finally, she could hear no sound at all, except for the faint whine of the wind, which had begun to rise, during the fight.

Suddenly, cold with a great fear, Moira rushed to the bed and burrowed beneath the quilts. For the rest of the night, she lay curled into a numb ball, trying to tell herself that Tray could take care of himself, and trying not to feel like a coward for not opening the door and looking for him.

The dawn broke as pink and tender as if it was just another morning, but Moira knew that it was not. Tray had not come back, whining at the door to be let in after frightening away the midnight prowler. Moira watched the light fill the window, then rose and hurriedly dressed.

Timidly, she opened the cabin door and stepped out, resenting what the night had done to her. Her peace was shattered, her armor of apathy breached.

The flower beds showed the marks of the battle; broken flowers lay scattered on the earth. She called for Tray, hesitantly, then louder, but received no answer other than a bird call from the woods. Shivering, she ventured farther, then farther, from the cabin.

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It was down by the woodshed that she found him. His once intelligent eyes were dusty and glazed, and his glossy coat splattered with blood.

Tray was a large dog, and heavy. In her present state of mind, Moira knew that she could not bury him alone. After covering him with a tarp, she got into the car and drove, dry-eyed and almost unthinkingly, down to Four Corners, where she knew Mr. Thompson would be minding his one gas pump, cold drink machine, and a small collection of groceries. Miss. Rhode's place was closer, but there would be no one there but the old woman, and Moira needed the physical strength of a man.

When she pulled to a stop at the Corners, she could see that there were two other men there, besides Mr. Thompson. One of them she recognized as Old Man Crowly, a crotchety old relic who lived up in the hills behind Thompson's place. She did not recognize the other man.

Her legs felt unsteady, but she tried to appear calm and unemotional as she faced their studiously closed, but nonetheless expectant faces.

"I need some help," she said simply. "My dog has been killed. I need someone to help me bury him."

Moira thought that she could sense contempt behind their blank eyes. Probably *their* women could bury a dog or kill and skin a hog, if necessary.

She tried again. "I thought that since you gentlemen know about wild animals, maybe you could tell me what kind of animal killed him."

Their faces softened a little. In the end all three of them came with her; Thompson putting up a "closed" sign against his rickety gas pump, and following her in his ruin of a pickup.

At the site of the death, they hunkered down around Tray, looking at him from every angle, examining the scuffed-up dust around the body. They examined the flower bed carefully, particularly the footprint Moira had protected. They chewed their wads of snuff, and talked quietly among themselves until Moira felt like an intruder.

Then they buried Tray in back of the house, and wiped their red hands on the legs of their jeans, and prepared to leave.

Moira realized that they were going to say nothing unless she directly confronted them. She planted herself in front of Thompson, and attempted to look him in the eye.

"What killed him, Mr. Thompson? What killed Tray?"

He kept his eyes studiously on the ground.

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"Oh, could have been a bear, I guess. Maybe a wolf. There's a few of them left, they say."

The other men stood silently, scuffling their heavy boots in the dust.

Moira bit her lip, then almost pleadingly touched Thompson's arm. "Miss Rhode said something about a Goatman..."

Thompson at last looked up. "What'd she say?"

"She said something about his killing a dog, another dog, and she said I should be careful and keep Tray close to the house."

"Should of done," said Old Man Crowly, sharply. "Goatman has done for a lot of good dogs."

Thompson gave the old man an angry glance, but to Moira's relief, Crowly went on. "She has a right to know, her a woman alone here. It's best that she knows."

"Miss Rhode didn't explain," she said humbly. "Won't you tell me what Goatman is? Please?"

"Oh, hell!" said Thompson. "Might as well. Goatman's a woodsy thing, Missy. There's been stories about him as long as I can recollect. Most of the time he lives back deep in the woods, but every once in a while he comes out, closer to where people live, and somebody sees him. I've heard said that he's the last of his kind, and comes out because he gets lonesome. Dogs hate him, and they attack him, and sometimes, I guess, he has to kill them to protect himself. Sometimes he kills other things, too, or at least so they say."

Old Man Crowly pulled off his hat and scratched his thinning white hair. "There's all kinds of stories. Some say that he does good things too. I've heard tell that sometimes he helps folks that git lost in the woods. And Mrs. Jenkins swears that he pulled out her milk cow that got stuck in the bog."

"What does he look like?" Moira's question came out so softly that she was surprised that Thompson heard her.

"Some say he looks like a hairy man, with goat's ears. Some say he's half man and half goat. But all say that he's terrible strong. Some say he's killed men and women, too, but myself, I think that's just scare talk."

Old Man Crowly spat in the dirt. "My old Grandma, she used to tell us that if'n someone, a woman, would go with Goatman, back to his hidey-hole in the woods, he wouldn't bother folks no more. Swore it was true; that once, when she was a girl, a young woman went out to him, went with him, and for twenty years nobody seen hide nor hair of either of them. When he started

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showin' up again folks figured that she had died. They tried to get another girl to go, but no one would do it. They was all afraid."

Moira felt the hair along her backbone stir, and clasped herself with her arms. She looked searchingly at each man, but not one weathered face expressed anything but sincerity and embarrassment. It was, she realized, not easy for these men to speak to her of these things.

"Then you think Goatman killed Tray?" she said.

Thompson shrugged. "Didn't say so, Missy. You just asked what we know about Goatman, and I told you. Well, boys, we'd best be on our way."

Moira gave each of the men a few dollars, and they got into the old pickup and moved off down the road. She watched them until they were out of sight.

That night, for the first time in months, the nightmares came back. In her dreams she saw Jason's face. Then Jason's face was replaced by a bizarre, hirsute countenance.

In the next moment, Moira snapped awake, suddenly and completely. The image of the dream was still in her mind, and her first reaction was wonder, as she realized that in her dream, she had been much more frightened by the face of her ex-husband than by the face of Goatman.

As she became conscious of the fact that Tray was not beside her, that she was completely alone, a cold trickle of fear seemed to slide beneath the warm quilt and lie against her belly.

She lay awake until dawn, but heard nothing unusual inside or outside the cabin. As she got out of bed, still tired, she could not understand why she felt a sense of disappointment.

Victor paid his weekly visit the next day, and when he asked about Tray, Moira told him that Tray had wandered off, and had not come home. She didn't dare tell him that the dog had been killed; she just didn't feel up to the pressure he would put on her to leave the cabin, and come back to the city.

Even so, he was upset. "I don't like the idea of you being here alone," he said, and she could see his real concern for her in his eyes. "It was bad enough with just the dog, but at least I felt that you had some protection."

She shrugged and raised her hands. "Against what, Victor? Just what do you think is going to harm me out here?"

As she said the words, a guilty shiver tingled up her spine, and she

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wondered at herself, at her action. Tray's death had made her feel that she really might be in physical danger; and yet, she couldn't bear the thought of leaving this cabin, this place. She dismissed the thought and concentrated on using her charm to sway Victor into being more accepting of her plans to stay.

"You can bring me another dog," she said, smiling at him, and touching his hand. "A very large, fierce dog, if you wish."

She could tell that he still wasn't happy about her decision, but at least he did not seem disposed to argue further.

THAT NIGHT she prepared herself for bed very carefully, telling herself that it was because she needed a good night's sleep, and bedtime rituals could be very important. In the warm glow of lantern light, she had a lovely bath before the fire. Then she put on the long, old-fashioned lawn nightgown that felt so soft against the skin. After that, she brushed her hair a hundred strokes, and then made a pot of chamomile tea, sweetened with honey, which she drank with the last of the almond cookies which Victor had brought her from the city.

When at last she crawled into bed, she felt very drowsy and relaxed. Settling herself into the soft pillows, she felt safe and protected. As she sank into sleep she wondered that she felt none of the nervousness or fear that had plagued her the night before.

She knew she dreamed that night, because when she awoke the shadow of the dream was still there, a feeling of joy, of freedom, of arousal; she wanted to cling to it, but it slipped away as consciousness brushed it aside.

She found herself sitting up in her bed, the covers thrown aside, listening for the sound that had awakened her.

At first there was nothing but the wind, and the soft cry of a night bird, and then it came, growing softly, swelling, swirling. She put her hand to her throat. It was beautiful, like nothing she had ever heard.

Getting out of bed, she slid her feet into her slippers, her skin drawing back from the cold smoothness of the leather. From the foot of the bed she took her blue and purple shawl, gratefully drawing its soft warmth about her shoulders. It was odd how alive she felt, how aware of every physical thing, the touch of cloth, the cold woodsy scent of the air. And there was something else on the air, another scent, musky and stirring.

She took a deep breath, and moved toward the door, knowing now that

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she had come here for a reason, that she had not been running away from, but running toward, something.

Opening the door, she went out to meet it.

Behind her the wind swept leaves into the room, the lantern went down, and the fire went out. That was the way Victor found the cabin when he came to see her the next week.

"That we both want to be reincarnated as cats
is a lovely and comforting thought, Mr. Burlington,
but not necessarily the basis for a deep and lasting relationship."

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"The Noonday Pool" marks Ian MacLeod's second F&SF cover story for 1995. His first, "Tirkiluk," in our February issue, was a dark story set in ice and snow, perfect for winter. "The Noonday Pool" welcomes spring in all her majesty.

Ian writes that he first thought of this story after reading Michael Kennedy's studies of Sir Edward William Elgar. "I then envisaged a more positive great-man-creates-great-new-work outcome, which I found I couldn't actually manage to write; Elgar's later years weren't wildly happy ones, anyway. The story as it is now is really an attempt to define my own attitude toward the muse..."

The Noonday Pool

By Ian R. MacLeod

PEG COULD HEAR A TRAIN coming. The night express.

She pushed hair from her eyes and sank down on her knees to the earth. She was in the place between the reeds and nettles, where steel tracks and the wandering river were drawn together by the hills. She could hear the dark beat emerging from the shimmering night, the stuttering engine breath. She waited. There were stars on the river, starlight on the rails.

The train was fast. The sound became a wall, blocking the hills. A long scarf of smoke diamonded with sparks trailed the sky. Carriage lights pearled the river. Peg reached down, pushing her fingers through a wet thatch of grass, curling them back around the mud.

The tracks wheezed and creaked. The train was upon her. Lights and wheels blasted by with the city reek of oil and coal. She fixed her moment, crouching on the trembling soil. She balled the mud tight until it began to worm through her fist. She held what was left and hitched back her arm. Biting her lip, she hurled it at the streaming carriage lights.

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* * *

These were painful moments for Sir Edward. Just hours before, he'd been basking in waves of applause. Who, after all, who would dare to criticize his own interpretation of his symphonies? — even if he had known in his heart that the orchestra had played the over-familiar work by rote, and that the second French horn had been disgracefully off key in those vital, yearning opening bars of the slow movement.

Afterward, there had been hands to shake, and then the Trustees of the orchestra and some other worthies had taken him to Armando's, his favorite London restaurant where the maître d' of twenty years standing knew all his foibles. Apart from the predictably excellent food, dinner had been a bore. The worthies had laughed dutifully at his jokes and nodded seriously at his creakingly ancient stories of meeting Brahms and Joachim, even though he was sure that they must have heard them almost as many times as he had himself.

He left in time to catch the late express back to the Midlands. Even before the recent trouble with his lower back that Dr. Walters in Harley Street still insisted was probably nothing more than sciatica, the great man had come to dislike sleeping away from home. And the guard — whom he'd known for almost as long as Armando's maître d' — had kept a first class compartment locked specifically for his use. The great man had sunk back into the plush seats, relishing the absence of company and gentle pull of the train as it drew into darkness from the lighted cavern of the station.

But after an hour or so, his bladder, filled with the remains of several glasses of wine — and, he now remembered, at least three helpings of Armando's excellent coffee — began to feel like a distended balloon. And the guard, ever conscious of the great man's desire for solitude, had thoughtfully locked the linking compartment doors, sealing him off from the toilets at both ends. Beyond pulling the communication cord, there was no way he could even talk with anyone else on the train.

So Sir Edward shifted in his seat and clenched his fists, the train rumbled through the night, and the sensation in his bladder became a fiery ball of need. And his discomfort was worsened by the thought that it was *he*, he who had lunched at Balmoral and whose name had been mentioned in the same breath as the Germanic greats, should be dragged down to the level of an anxious, wriggling schoolchild. He checked his half hunter fob watch, heavy on the

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gold chain that Richter had given him: only twenty more minutes of this agony to go. But the thought brought little comfort. Nothing brought any comfort. He drummed his fingers on the cold glass. Faintly, beyond the spinning rails, he could see the gray gleam of the river in the carriage lights, that river whose moods and seasons he had portrayed in numerous songs, two quartets and his one great tone poem. The river...the water...the...*no*... Something lifeless and gray, tumbling end over ragged end out of the darkness toward him. In fear, he jerked his eyes away. A moment later, it struck the glass.

Brown tentacles crawled back and down. Only mud and yet still the shock was almost too much. His bladder nearly gave way, and for a moment the pleasure of doing so almost overbalanced the terrible shame. But he held himself in, and crossed his legs tight as the mud spread into a lopsided star across the glass.

The minutes clawed by. The train began to slow: just for him, an unscheduled stop at the local station, for the great man alone. He hitched himself upright as the train halted, and moved with slow, painful steps toward the carriage door. The guard, who had run along the side of the train, opened the door for him and stepped to one side with an almost military salute. The great man eased himself down to the platform. The station, he saw, was closed. The first class waiting room was locked, and with it the toilets. As was (he was in no mood to be fussy) the second class waiting room: the last scheduled train would have departed several hours before. In the warm lights of the carriages, faces were pressed to the glass, straining for a glimpse. They would see him walking at an awkward shuffle, bent half double, and would remark how much older the great man had suddenly become, how the recent photographs in the newspapers couldn't be quite so recent after all.

Sir Edward's chauffeur was waiting at the far end of the platform. Home, he told himself as the train pulled off through billows of steams, wasn't far off along these deep country lanes he knew so well. Somehow, clenching every muscle in his body, he climbed down the steps from the station and into the Bentley's leather interior. The pain was no longer localized in his bladder, but drove itching needles through his entire body, and burned like a brand over the ache in his lower back.

The Bentley started up. Headlights swung across hedgerows and trees before centering on the narrowed, rutted road. The chauffeur, with whom Sir Edward normally enjoyed a good repartee, slid back the communicating glass

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to ask how the concert had gone, but found his employer to be terse and uncommunicative. Used to these varying moods, the chauffeur drove on in silence. The great man, however, was swimming through agony. Unlike the train, the Bentley rumbled unpredictably along the uneven roads, the soft swings bouncing this way and that.

About a mile from home, he knew he could last no longer. He growled instructions to stop through clenched teeth and managed to mutter something about walking the rest of the way as he levered his shrieking body out of the car into the night air. Shifting from one foot to the other, clenching and unclenching his fists, he watched the Bentley pull slowly away before staggering like a drunk toward the dark hedgerow. The whole night seemed to be singing and swaying with his need.

The final actions were delicate. But somehow he managed without spillage or mishap.... And gave way to blissful relief. Sparks fluttered before his eyes. A huge and airy rush of well-being invaded his body.

And then, when it was far too late to stop, he heard someone approaching on light, unhurried feet.

Peg could feel that this night lay at the heart of summer. On all sides, almost forever, there was nothing but endless blue avenues of leaf-shimmered sky, cuckoo cries and dove coos far into the green twilight; a circlet of warm days and nights like the stars that encircled the heavens.

The woodland curved and shimmered around her in the slide of a rising, fattening moon. The air was palpable, dense. Scented moss and drooping white lanterns of nightshade made a pathway. And now, there were braids of dry undergrowth, and the smell of human spoor and litter. She saw the watery glint of broken glass, and the flattened patch of grass beneath the boughs of the old white willow where she had watched a boy and a girl tumble and laugh. Bracken crackled beneath her feet. She could have moved silently if she wished, but she liked the snap and echo of her footsteps as she moved through the bowing, summer-heavy dark....

Then there was another sound. She cocked her head, and smiled. The sound was one she recognized easily, although it differed slightly from the one she made herself. She picked her way around a dry snaggle of holly, toward the sound, and the shimmer of the roadway.

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Sir Edward stood there stupidly, unable to stop — disguise, even — what he was doing. The nettles and brambles hissed and clattered in the dribbles of a low parabola, as (his bladder no longer furnishing the torrents of youth) he waited for nature to take its protracted course. He was glad at least that the darkness shrouded him with some little modesty; especially when the few details he could make out of the figure suggested that it was young and female. But for many long seconds, the sensation of release was too sharply bright for him to devote any real attention to his audience. It was only as the flow finally thinned that the proportions of the incident began to play alarming discords in his mind. What if she were one of the ghastly daughters of the local gentry whose abilities on the piano he was occasionally forced to admire? What if — worse still — she were just a maid at one of their houses. Girls of breeding (unless, dear God, they went straight to the *Police*) could generally be expected to remain silent about incidents such as this, but the giggly females belowstairs.... With their involvement, word would quickly spread across the entire neighborhood.

"I, er, don't suppose you know who I am?" he asked hopefully, buttoning himself up.

To his pleasant surprise, the dim figure shook her head. Then spoiled the effect by saying, "But I've seen you about."

Still bathing, despite his embarrassment, in the absurdly rosy glow (how crisply wonderful the trees looked against the stars; the shimmer of the road like gray velvet!), Sir Edward straightened his shoulders and set off at what he hoped was a brisk and purposeful pace. The pace of one who, above all, wished no other company than his own.

In a moment, he was past the girl. The dusky open road beckoned. In another moment, she had fallen into step beside him.

"I know where you live," she said. "That big house beyond the greenwood with the copper beeches. When I sit on the hill above near the place where the fox brings her cubs in spring, I can see right into a room where you sit and stare at those blank pieces of paper...."

So much for anonymity. The girl was obviously ill-educated, but she knew more than enough about him to spread the word about tonight. Sir Edward's left hand went up to pull at the corner of his large mustache — a

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nervous habit he'd never quite been able to conquer. He forced it down to his side again and into a marching swing as he concentrated on setting a brisk, military pace. Pom pom, diddily-pom, and trying not to wince. Now his bladder was empty, that confounded pain in his back was worse than ever.

"And where," he asked, "do you live?"

"Oh, I don't live anywhere."

He glanced at her. He doubted if she meant it literally, but it was obvious that she was some kind of waif or stray. In vague starlight through the overreaching trees, what little he could make out of her suggested greasily stringy hair, a face patched with grime, ragged clothes of uncertain gray. Someone who looked to be in need of a wash. No, he corrected himself as he caught a salty whiff of her skin, someone who *was* in need of a wash.

"What's your name?"

"Peg."

"Is it your custom to wander alone this late at night?"

"I don't know anything about custom."

"Where do you, ah, sleep?"

"Last night, it was under the big thorn bush near the river. Across the steel rails. I don't like sleeping too close to the Noonday Pool in case...." She gave a noisy shudder.

He nodded. Peg was obviously homeless and mad. That, at least, was a relief. No one would ever believe her story of seeing him relieving himself against a bush, even if she attempted to tell it.

They walked on in silence. Peg kept easily in step beside him, moving with a lightness that contrasted with the heavy rasp of his brogues. They seemed to be heading in the same direction, which — now that they had passed the darkened farmhouse some way back along the road — the great man realized led only to his own dwelling.

They crested a hill, and the parlor lights glowed — a single ember in the deep bowl of the valley below. Mrs. France, his housekeeper, would still be up, knitting and dozing, waiting for his return so she could lock up the house. Mrs. France was a great one for waifs and strays. Cats and dogs, even squirrels — she was always taking them in...

Waifs and strays. Sir Edward gave one of his notoriously rare smiles, secure in the knowledge that it wouldn't be seen in the darkness. He turned to Peg.

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"If you have nowhere to sleep," he said, "I'm sure my housekeeper could find somewhere for you. Provided," he raised a stern finger, "that your honesty and propriety are beyond reproach."

"What's propriety?" Peg asked.

He chuckled. Together, they headed on toward the glowing beacon of the house.

NEXT MORNING, as he had done all his life, Sir Edward awoke early. He lay still for a moment, gazing at the play of dawn light on his curtains, listening to the liquid song of a blackbird in the garden. It was the same blackbird that he heard on every fair morning, and it sang another version of its usual song — although, as always, the exact particulars of the tune were slightly different. Those four ascending notes that lay somewhere close to A-B-C-A and followed by a scattering trill were still there, but the creature was ornamenting it now with a kind of backward coda — still A-B-C-A, yet almost in the minor. Of course, the sound was nothing more than a dumb animal proclaiming its territory, and as artless as a child in a garden piping on a whistle. But it was clear, pure, filled with variety, invention. Life.

He swung his legs over the side of his bed, and sat rubbing his lower back. Then, as the pain lessened to a dull murmur and he slid his bare feet into his slippers, the events of the previous evening returned to him. The girl Peg would be somewhere in the house at this very moment — doubtless still asleep. At this moment, the whole house was asleep. Even the undermaids didn't start work on the fires until well past five. The great man dressed and performed his ablutions, relishing as he always did the chill of the water on his hands and face, the pull of the razor, the coolness of a clean white vest, the ticking silence of the house that surrounded him. He could, of course, have arranged things so that there was bustle and warmth, banging of grates and the smell of breakfast, even at this early hour — he was, after all, the master — but, an habitual early riser, he had always enjoyed the sensation of being the first to be up and about.

He set out along the corridor and down the wide carpeted stairs toward the kitchen, where his dog Mina leapt up from the rug to greet him. He scratched the spaniel's ears and, knowing that he was unobserved, briefly

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kissed her wet nose. The fire in the range was low, but still warm, and the kettle was filled and ready. Humming A-B-C-A ascending, he placed it on the hob, cut himself a thick slice of bread and spread it with dripping, then sat down before the glow on a three-legged stool. He treasured these early moments in the kitchen, surrounded by the dull gleam of copper and the scents of soot, laundry starch and yesterday's cooking as, watched by Mina's adoring eyes, he listened for the kettle's soft rattle as it prepared to steam and whistle. It reminded him of his parents' little house in Worcester — long-since bulldozed for some ghastly development — and of the long years of his marriage when, once the watched kettle had finally boiled, he would warm and fill the teapot, place it on a tray with the daisy-yellow cup and saucer, and carry it upstairs through the dim and peaceful house. Not, he sometimes thought, that Caroline had always welcomed being woken, but the early mornings were indeed beautiful, and it had become part of the ritual of their life together.

The kettle started to boil. Little gobbets of water jumped from the spout, leaping about on the hob like dervishes before disappearing in wafts of gray. Then the whistle screeched, and the great man snatched a dishcloth to hold the braided iron handle, warmed the pot, and spooned in the tea. Just enough for himself now, of course. It had been that way for many years.

With Mina trotting in his wake, Sir Edward walked along the tiled hall, up the narrow side-stairs and through the door that led to the upper study. Placing the teacup on his desk, he pulled the tassels that opened the velvet curtains, and long beams of early summer sunlight flooded in.

There, outside. The moist shadowed garden, the soft woodland and hills beyond still half-unreal with dawn. In a sense, it was his life's work — all that he had ever sought to portray. The great man turned back toward the study, whose walls were covered with his framed awards, decorations, honors: those polished squares of glass of which, such was the angle of the dawn sun, were now filled only with the reflected images of blue dawn and mullioned windows.

He sat down at his desk. It was already nearing five o'clock, and, as always, it was time for him to commence work. The routine went back fifty years to when he'd first been married and the money had been damnably short. In those days, he'd have maybe an hour to spare on composition before

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putting on his coat and setting out on a day of teaching a series of rich, dumb, and uninterested children the rudiments of harmony. His last appointments, where he was expected to enlighten the leisure of tone-deaf lawyers and malodorous bank managers, often went on until nine or ten at night. He'd come back home to Caroline with the muscles on his face tense from smiling, his hands trembling, his ears still ringing with the screech of badly made music — but glad at least that that precious time in the early morning had been his own. Now, for many years now, the great man had until lunchtime — all day if he wished — to entice the muse. But he was a morning worker. Even in the darkest days of winter, there was still that promise in the air.

Sir Edward unlocked and opened a drawer at the side of the desk, and lifted out one of the dozen small card-covered notebooks that lay there. On the front there was a year and a date, written in his own hand. The book was — what? — fifty years old now. He fanned the yellowed pages, breathing the musty aroma. His handwriting had been neater then, clearer. Like everything else — like his ability to urinate — it had become crabbed and constricted over the years. But there, *that* was what he was looking for. He pressed the page flat, and reached for a fresh white sheet of staved paper from the pile he kept ready on the corner of his desk.

There, in the notebook, was the motif he'd been after. He could even remember writing it. It had been soon after the first decent performance of one of his oratorios at the cathedral festival, when the reviews had been ecstatic, and his confidence was high. He'd been in love, too, and the money was starting to come. A wet morning in a steamy Worcester coffee house with the pretty yellow-haired waitress fluttering around him and a view through the window of the bright swollen river. It had come to him just like that, in the moment between one sip of coffee and the next. Flashing by too quickly to be truly heard, yet there, undoubtedly there, ready to be snatched into this world from whatever place it had come, to be captured in this notebook before the rents of time closed around it again. He looked at it now. That long, loping melody. Rising and falling, meandering, yet always sure. True to itself. Like the brown river he had seen through the condensation of that coffee house window. Flowing onward, never lost. Dah, dah, dee...

He unscrewed the top of his fountain pen. Yes, it was truly as good and vivid as he remembered. Exactly right for the developmental theme in the

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second movement of his long-awaited third symphony. Dah, dah, dee... Start with the violincellos to give it some depth. Keep it simple, yet overlay triads from the second strings. But his pen still hovered over the paper. He snapped at himself to get on with it, and quickly drew the clef, and sketched down abbreviations for the main instruments. There, the page was ready now. Nothing fancy, no need for detail. The orchestra. Poised. Waiting. Dah, dah, dee...

Sir Edward looked up for a moment. Again, he could hear the song of the blackbird in the garden. A-B-C-A. That simple rising quadruplet, robust yet innocent, followed by a trill. And the rising sun was stretching shadows across the lawn, kindling a white fire in the beads of dew that had formed in the heavy throats of the flowers. And the blackbird was singing. Laughing.

He shook his head, trying to regain concentration. But somehow, he knew that the theme from the notebook wasn't yet right. He was sure the tune was a good one — after all, hadn't the pages of this particular notebook furnished the material he'd used for the slow movement of his cello concerto, the Judas theme for his last (but unfinished) great oratorio? — yet he wasn't sure that it would blend with the other theme that he was intending to employ in the second movement. For a start, the two tunes came from different notebooks, different years. Not that that should matter. But it did. He'd grown increasingly superstitious about these notebooks.

Dah dee dee... But, yes,the problem of combining the themes lay in that lift toward the tonic. It came too early in the melody, drew the listener one way, then pulled him another. It would surely be a simple task to put that right. To re-draw the phrase...

Finally, his lips pursed, the great man put pen to paper. Dah, dee, *dee*...

Peg knew from the sound of birdsong in the trees coming in through the open window that she was up near the roof of the house. It was already long past dawn — already late morning by her standards — and her body felt stiff and odd, encased in all this white linen. And they'd insisted last night that she wash, too. Still, it was nice to be here in this room with the human smells of dust, dead wood, old cobwebs and some odd kind of lavender, pressed up close to the roof and the sky.

She got up, and wriggled and pulled at the cloth of her nightgown until something gave. Then, stepping out of it, she gazed down at her reflection in

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the bowl of water on the table by the window. A clean white face and shoulders, clean red-yellow hair. She bent down until her lips touched those of her reflection, and lapped at the water. Then, wiping her nose and mouth on the back of her hand, she opened the bedroom door, and skipped down the crooked stairs.

And there was Mrs. France again in the hall below. All red face and bluster under a comical white bonnet, trying to shoo her back up the stairs. *Whatever your name is, Young Lady,* Mrs. France hissed, *I can tell you're not so daft as to go around like Eve...*

Of course, Peg knew about clothes — you wore them to look pretty, or to keep out the chill — and she even acquiesced when Mrs. France summoned a young girl called Maid to help her dress. You're about my size, Maid said, which was true enough, although she looked at Peg as though she'd never seen a pink whole body before in her entire life. Once she was dressed, Maid took Peg down the hall to a mirror, and she saw a young human woman like those she had often watched climbing out of carriages and cars. Dressed in blue and white, her legs and her arms entirely hidden. She had to laugh.

The door of the upper study opened, and Mrs. France carried in a tray containing Sir Edward's breakfast of bacon, coffee, marmalade and toast. He wouldn't eat that much of it — he never did — but the fact that he filched a meal of bread and dripping from the kitchen every morning was a shared but unacknowledged secret between them.

Mrs. France remained standing there after she had placed the tray on the desk beside him and removed his tea cup. She cleared her throat.

Fighting back the premonition that something odd or bad was about to happen, the great man looked up from the blank staved sheet he'd been staring at.

"What is it, Mrs. France? Has the post been?"

"Yes. But nothing from Dr. Walters."

He nodded, unsure whether he felt disappointed or relieved. Letters of any kind were a distraction when he was working, but he'd given orders that anything from Harley Street was to be carried straight to him.

"That, ah, young lady you, ah..." Mrs. France blinked, her face even redder than usual. "...brought in with you last night."

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"Oh, you mean Peg." So that was all. "And I suppose you want to know what to do with her?"

"Sir, I'm not sure that she's quite right in the head. She seems very — well, *wild's* the word I'd use. I don't think there's any harm in her, but her ways are like a young animal's. She hasn't been brought up at all."

He slowly nodded. A young animal. He had half a mind to ask Mrs. France for details but, thinking of the things that young animals did — and sparing her blushes — he decided against it.

"Does she say she has a home?"

Mrs. France gave the great man one of her famous looks. Over the many years that she had worked for him, he'd become an expert in the subtle and often alarming intricacies of Mrs. France's facial language. This particular look, he interpreted to mean: *You're the one who brought the creature here — and you're the one who should be answering any questions.*

"She says not, sir," Mrs. France said eventually. "She says she lives in the woods, and I'm inclined to believe her, although we've never seen her hereabouts before."

"You've fed her?"

"And washed her. I can tell you that she's causing a fair commotion and delay in the kitchen. And I can't just let her wander around the premises, now can I? We all of us have things to do."

"All right." The great man steepled his fingers and nodded. "I can see that you — " Mrs. France glared " — I mean, *we* have a problem. But I would like to speak to this girl. The trouble of it is..." He glanced over Mrs. France's shoulder at the ormolu clock above the bookshelves. Quarter to six already. "...I can't do so until noon at the earliest. I must stick to my routine."

"Of course."

Then he had an idea. "Why not put her out in the garden until then? She can't do much damage there, now can she? Give her a coat or whatever. Something more to eat. I'll see her there as soon as I've finished work."

"The garden." Mrs. France gave him another of her looks. "And I suppose you'll want me to speak to Mr. Groves and tell him she'll be wandering at will amongst his plantings?"

"If you would, Mrs. France." To avoid another glare, he returned his eyes to the blank paper before him. "If you would."

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Mrs. France stood there above him for a moment longer. Then, in eloquent silence, she turned and left the room.

Stepping out into the sunlit garden, Peg pulled off the boots and stockings she'd been given, leaving them side by side on the doorstep as she had seen shoes left outside other human dwellings. Beyond the shadows thrown by the house, the wide expanse of stone paving was already dry and warm beneath her bare feet, and the high red brick wall that reached toward the greenhouses glowed in patches of fire between the quivering strands of honeysuckle, sweet pea and climbing ivy.

The air was in chaos with birdsong. Up along the path, hidden in the green heavy boughs of an oak tree, a blackbird was shouting out his territory. Dum dee dee... And there, the quicker, lighter song of a thrush. She turned this way and that. Dizzy, marveling. It truly was another wonderful summer morning.

Skipping from the pavement to the lawn, crouching down, she ran her hands through the wet grass and raised her fingers to her lips, licking the jewels of dew that dangled there. They tasted dark and green and earthy, still tangled up with the star-bound secrets of night. Even after all the jam and butter that Maid and Mrs. France had given her, it made her feel hungry.

More than five hours after he had started work, Sir Edward finally put down his pen. On one side of his desk, the pile of blank staved paper had gone down a little. On the other, the wastebin was full. And between, on the leather-cornered blotter, lay the sheet that he'd just finished working on.

He gazed at the changed melody. It limped up and down the clef, shifted direction, tone, three or four times in the space of a few bars. And the original, that long, loping, pristine tune that he'd extracted from his notebook.... Looking at it now, he was no longer sure. The wrong tune? Perhaps that had always been the problem.

It was all gone now, anyway — another morning was finished, wasted. And, although this room was still cool, outside in the garden even the birds had been silenced by the noonday heat. And his third symphony still awaited. Unstarted. Unsung. He glanced up at the wall where, in the late morning sunlight, the frames no longer mirrored the scene beyond the window. There. The certificate of his knighthood. There. A programme that consisted

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entirely of his work, in the presence of her late Majesty, the Queen. There. An honorary degree (one of many) from Oxford. There. He was shaking hands for the camera with his one-time friend and admirer Richard Strauss (who was now squandering his gifts on pompous, grubby music for that pompous and grubby new German Chancellor). There. An impressive-looking gold medal from the Royal Philharmonic Society (although for what, he could no longer remember). There. The first review in the *Times* of what they were describing as his first great masterpiece (and now often enough said was his only one) and even then they were puzzling over the enigma, the origin of the theme. There. There. That. He'd have swapped them all for one good, new tune. Another enigma. For a moment like that moment on that long-ago rainy morning in that Worcester coffee house.

He turned the pages of the notebook. Months and years flew by. Here was something he'd written in Venice, the slow, stately march that formed the basis of his first symphony. He remembered the play of sunlight on ancient water as he sat on his hotel balcony at the Danieli. He remembered the campanile bells that carved the watery golden air. And here, over the page in just two bars of faded ink, he saw scotch pines on a Scottish hilltop, bowing in the warm breath of a summer wind. And here, the scented candle-darkness of Worcester Cathedral. The tunes and the themes were all hurried, sketched with not a semiquaver more than necessary, the page balanced by a hand or a knee, yet the music was always captured with ease and precision. It had all been there, whole years of music simply waiting to be expanded and unraveled. He turned the page again and saw a dark winter's twilight. The frozen river. And that, too, had been used. The cello concerto — the last real and decent thing he'd finished. Every decent fragment and moment in the notebook. It had all been used.

He closed the notebook, and looked out of the window. He saw that the girl Peg was out on the lawn. The foundling. Twirling in a blue dress. Her red-yellow hair fanning out in the sunlight. Her face uplifted.

MRS. FRANCE, having finished her noontime tour of the house to check that the maids had performed their duties before His Grouch finally emerged from his study, took the back stairs on the way out to see to her foundlings.

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Emerging into the stable yard, she paused for a moment, struck by the heat that came in waves off the cobbles, and by a return of her anger at His Grouch's nerve in bringing that creature Peg to the house.

She's just like your foundlings, Mrs. France, he'd wheedled last night in the hall as that dog of his barked and growled and the Peg-creature stood right there beside him, grinning as-you-please and stinking the place out. As though *that* young lady could in any way shape or form be compared to the poor motherless hedgehogs, broken-winged birds, and injured rabbits she tended in the hutches beside the walled garden....

Puffing her cheeks, Mrs. France strode across the stable yard, turning swiftly right under the archway that led past the cloches and the potato store. Well, at least the brazen little hussy was somewhere out in the garden now, where she could do little harm. She could only hope that His Grouch would see sense by this evening, and send her smartly off the premises. After all, it wasn't like him to show much interest in anyone or anything these days — apart, of course, from that dog — and surely he wasn't so daft as to have his head turned by the pretty face and figure of some cheap little village runaway? No, Mrs. France decided, that was most unlikely. He was far too much of a snob for that. But, whatever happened, she most certainly wasn't prepared to put up with another scene like that in the kitchen at breakfast. Scooping up bits of butter and jam with her fingers, and then spitting out fried kidneys like a two-year-old, complaining that they were *cooked,* would you believe?

As Mrs. France walked along the gravel path that ran by the main garden, His Grouch's dog ran up to her. She crouched down and briefly rubbed behind the creature's ears, mimicking affection as she usually did because the presence of the dog generally meant that Him himself wasn't far behind. But, looking back along the path toward the house, then across the shimmering lawn, she decided that there was no sign of anyone, and pushed the whining, slobbering animal away.

It ran off toward the house with its tail stuck between its legs, and Mrs. France straightened herself up. Just as she was about to walk on, she saw two figures beyond the line of copper beeches at the far end of the garden. They wavered like ghosts in the heat, but there was no mistaking His Grouch with his hat and walking stick — and that girl Peg. Walking together. As Mrs. France watched, they passed through the picket gate that led into the woods

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and disappeared from sight. Entirely into shadow.

Sighing, shaking her head, Mrs. France headed on along the hot gravel path. What did it matter what His Grouch got up to? He'd be in a foul enough mood this evening anyway when he read the review of last night's performance in the copy of the *Times* she'd just ironed for him. *Labored. Confused. Dated.* Not that she knew anything about his music — most of it went on far too long — but she'd always liked that marching tune, and a few bits of what he called his coffee-house music. Some of it, you could almost sing along to.

But this time of the day was her own, and Mrs. France resolved to think no more about His Grouch, or things to do with the house. Beyond the yew hedges lay the walled garden, and there, in a sheltered corner beside the thyme and the mint, were the hutches for her foundlings that kind Mr. Groves had made for her.

Turning into the walled garden, she knew instantly that something was wrong. The hutch doors hung open, and, along with the mint and the thyme, a familiar salt-sour smell hung in the warm air — the same aroma that pervaded the kitchen on days when she'd been busy gutting and hanging. As she crouched down over ragged lumps that lay in the loose grass before the hutches, the air was filled with the drone of disturbed flies.

Her foundlings were roughly gutted and skinned. Half eaten. Dead.

Sir Edward closed the latch on the gate, and followed Peg into the dappled woodland.

"You're very famous, aren't you?" she said.

He shrugged and smiled. "Some people might say that." Which was true. Some still did.

"And rich?"

"That too. By many standards."

"How many rooms have you got in that house of yours?"

"I don't know. I doubt if I've even been in all of them."

"If I had a big house," Peg said, "I'd be going into them all the time, just to make sure they were still there."

The great man chuckled, swinging his silver-top cane, looking up through the canopy at the flashing sun. He'd come this way often enough with Mina — who today, unaccountably, had run off — but walking with this

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girl Peg made it all seem a little different, a mite more real. He glanced over at her. Her eyes were startling blue, her lips incredibly red. Yet she wore no powder or paint, employed no artifice. And her long hair was neither blonde nor auburn nor red, but threaded with the russet of the shadows, the blaze of the sun...

The great man pulled at the tip of his mustache, and gazed along the soft green pathway. No fool, he reminded himself, like an old fool. And this girl Peg was just another well-made face and body, briefly blessed with health and youth. After all, and to his wife Caroline's occasional chagrin, he'd been a connoisseur of such things all his life — an appreciator of beauty. Beauty in music. Beauty in nature. Beauty in woman. It had always been so; even, as he now recalled, long ago in that steamy Worcester coffee house as he sat with a newspaper and a cup of coffee. Yes, he'd been watching the pretty yellow-haired waitress in the moment before the long, soft, lovely melody had passed by. Yes. She'd turned and smiled at him with her eyes through the bustle of the tables, and the tune had been there at that very instant. Had touched him with fingers both warm and chill.

"What are you famous for?" Peg asked.

"Music," he said, stepping over a tree root, rubbing at his back, trying to recall the last time he'd actually had to introduce or explain himself to someone in this way. "I compose tunes."

"Can you sing one for me?"

It wasn't quite impossible — he almost wanted to risk using his parched and cracked voice — but the only snippet that lodged in his head at that moment was *Jesu Maria, I am close to death* — a difficult, neglected piece at the best of times, and, here in the noonday heart of this greenwood summer, hardly appropriate.

"Perhaps when we get back to the house, I'll play you something on the piano — you do know about the piano?"

"It's a big harp."

Again he was laughing, nodding. Everything this girl said was so intrinsically right — yet totally unexpected. A big harp! Perhaps if he started thinking of the instrument in that way, he might even be able to compose for the clumsy clanking thing as his publishers at Booseys had always advised him to. But the idea just hung before him, out of reach in the shadowed heat. Decades too late.

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The great man looked around him. The path had branched at some point without his noticing. There was no birdsong. The air was hot, still, but the light shifted and danced on leaf-patterned ground in whatever breeze ruffled the treetops. Along the avenue ahead, everything seemed to dissolve and lose substance. It was like, he decided, looking into the heart of a green fire.

"Does this lead to where you live?" he asked.

"I told you. This wood's where I live."

"In this wood? Isn't it, ah...private property? I mean, I know Lord Shrewsbury — he's a friend, you know — permits me to wander on his at will. But still, that's rather different from living here, isn't it?" And why hadn't he ever seen her here before? But that was too many questions at once. She probably meant woodlands or out of doors in general.

Peg simply shrugged. "I've never seen this Lord you mention."

"No. I suppose not."

"But I'll show you my favorite place."

"I'd like that."

"But it doesn't belong to me," Peg added —unnecessarily.

"Of course."

"It's The Noonday Pool, and it belongs to nobody."

"As you wish." Sir Edward chuckled, twiddled the left tip of his mustache. "I'll tell Lord Shrewsbury next time I see him."

They walked on. Beneath boughs and branches, the claws of hawthorn were fluffed in white, and deep green patches of fern were ornate as ironwork. But, after all his years of wandering, this particular route was unfamiliar to him. He found the discovery to be pleasing rather than alarming. It was always the way with woodland — you never quite got to know it the way you did open land. But this plot was still only a few acres: all they'd have to do was walk in any direction, and they'd soon come to a fence.

This way. He followed Peg where the ground sloped down, and the trees made a stairway of sorts. The roots were thick and gnarled, overlapping into moss-filled hollows, and the trees themselves, he now saw as he paused to catch his breath where the slope deepened and narrowed into some kind of glen, were very ancient, knobbled and veined with parasitic growths. There were no newcomers like sycamore, walnut, sweet chestnut. Only oak. Bowed with age.

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"Come on!"

Peg was some way below him already. Calling, waving to him from out of the green fire. Her white hands, her white face, the shimmering gold of her hair. Levering his stick into the crotch of a tree for balance, feeling another surge of pain in his lower back, the great man pushed on, down.

When he finally caught up with Peg, she was standing on the lip of a kind of pool, although for some time his senses were too fogged for him to fully absorb the scene. He sat down on a convenient rock, and fished for a handkerchief to wipe his brow. Down here in this greenwood bowl the silence was intense, and it was even stiller, hotter. Yes, he must take off his jacket. He gathered his will for the exertion, undid the buttons and pulled the rapidly dampening cloth away from his chest and arms. Ah. Better....

"You're not used to this, are you?"

"No. Not for many years. When I was a lad, I'd go for miles. But..."

Fringed with foxglove, meadowsweet, bright yellow iris, the massive branches of oaks leaned over the pool in the center of the clearing. Leaving his coat, his cane, Sir Edward pushed himself up from his rock and waddled across a carpet of moss to stand on the stone lip, and peer in. The pool was as still as the day itself. Not a murmur, not a ripple. The water had an intense clarity. Beyond the reflections of his own face and the outstretched boughs that strained to touch and enclose the sky, he could see right through the surface. Down and down. Where translucent green gave to blue gave to silver-gray, and finally to darkness. There was no sign of a stream or source or spring. Wherever it came from must be somewhere deep, far out of sight.

He sat down again. This time, on the moss. It was soft enough, and not at all damp. In fact, surprisingly comfortable. Peg sat down beside him.

"I'm glad you took me here," he said. "You know, I'd never have guessed there was such a place."

He looked around again, took a breath of the deep summer air. The peppery scent of water elder. Cool still water. Mint forest darkness. Tansy and bindweed. And something feral, unidentifiable.

"This site could quite possibly repay serious academic investigation," he heard himself saying. "Now the Druids, the Romans, the Celts, would all have sought out a place such as this. I must write to Lord Shrewsbury and tell him of the possibilities. Of course, there's Malvern Camp, and the springs

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that are there, as mentioned in the writings of Julius Caesar. There could well be a link. I'm sure that if a dredging could be arranged there would be a strong likelihood of finding..."

Peg was watching him, cross-legged like an Indian, her bare feet tucked under, her sleeves rolled up.

"...of finding..."

The rusty golden fall of her hair. Eyes the color of the sky in that pool, blue with the shimmer of some far darkness.

"...ah, discovering..."

The vein inside the crook of her arm. The ripe-apple curve of her bare knees.

"Look," she said, reaching close by him. Again, he caught the feral scent as she plucked something from the tangles of undergrowth. He saw it was red in her hand, and that there were other drops of red amid the green, bright as scattered rubies. He saw her put it to her mouth, he saw scarlet juice break on her lips and teeth, and the movement of her throat as she swallowed.

"Wild strawberries?"

She nodded and wiped her lips. A smear of the juice was on her hand as she stretched out again. There were red crescents under her nails.

"Are they sweet?"

"Try."

He held out his hand, but she reached past it, toward his mouth. He felt heavy, warm, and numb. Like the air. He parted his lips, and felt her fingers brush against his mustache, then move on to touch his teeth, his tongue. He took the small fruit, and the taste of it was there in his mouth, and with it was the scent of her fingers, the fur and the salt and the hay and the linen. He closed his mouth and his eyes. The strawberry was tart and sweet. A drop of summer's blood.

"Is it good?"

He nodded, and felt himself blushing heavily; embarrassed by the intimacy of the moment, yet also somehow close to tears. Peg picked and ate another strawberry, then passed one to him. The juice, the scent on her fingers, the silent dell...

It was, for all its strangeness, a magical moment, and the great man could already feel part of his mind madly scurrying, searching. Hard at work.

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Another string serenade, perhaps? *Wild Strawberries? The Dell?* He might even risk dedicating it to this girl, as long as it wasn't made too obvious. Something cryptic that would get the critics wondering. And he could see them already, sitting in the Albert Hall, amazed at the hot, young flood of this piece.

Peg lay back, her hair fanning out over the moss. The great man gazed down at her. Where the skirt had fallen away from her right leg, he could see the lovely curve of her bare thigh. He tried to think of it in terms of marble perfection, classical beauty — the kind of thing an artist might express — although he knew that it was more.

"Sometimes, you can see the stars like this at midday," she said. "Up through the trees. But you have to lie still. You have to be silent..."

He nodded. He could feel the weight of the day pressing on his chest and shoulders. Carefully, crooking his elbows, he laid his head down beside Peg on the soft moss and looked up through the ancient branches, trying to see the midday stars. What she'd said was, he thought, just possible. An optical effect created by this shadowed dell. Writers since classical times, his mind, unasked, gambolled ahead to tell him, had recorded a similar effect when the sky was seen on a clear day from the bottom of a mine or well shaft...

Giving up, seeing only branches and midday blue, hearing nothing but the useless babble of facts in his head, and feeling only the dull burning pain in his back, the great man closed his eyes. And, oh, how he longed to create, to cut through whatever was inside him. Sometimes, for days and even weeks, there would be the illusion of progress. In the drawer below the one where he kept his notebooks, he had sketches and outlines galore. He'd even fully orchestrated one or two passages, although he'd known even at the time he was doing them that he was simply playing at composition, producing something he could show visitors and extemporize around on the piano.

Not that the music had ever been easy — but it had always been there. Even in these many years that he'd had to rely on the sketches in those notepads, there had been always something beyond the silence on which he could draw. And now, in his late years, in the time when he'd always imagined there'd be some kind of peace and fulfillment, the need to create burned more fiercely than ever. Hot and bright as this noonday sun, an all-consuming fire in his bones. Often, he'd just sit motionless at his desk for

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hours, tense with fear and anger and envy as he remembered days in the past when the music had poured past him, free and lucid as the flood of his beloved river. And he had taken it, trapped it, his pen had danced over the paper. It had spilled over, sang in his head as he sat waiting for trains, danced with moth wings as he talked with friends and strangers, played through the breeze as he walked with his Caroline, had flowed from the waitress's eyes as he sat with a newspaper in the warm steam of a Worcester coffee house.

His whole life, since an age too young to be clearly remembered, had been governed by this need to create, compose. Everything, evey sound, every sight, every emotion, had been perceived through the filter of that desire. Even at his wedding, he'd conquered his nervousness by listening for off-pitch middle C in the church organ to sound again. And, later, his time with the children had been governed by the disciplines of work. There was always the early risings, the mornings, the work that must be done before noon, and the letters and the books that had to be studied after. Every sensation, every blink and breath and heartbeat, had been absorbed and churned in the cogs of this great musical engine. He'd once thought that God was kind, to provide both the gift to create and the need to do so in roughly equal proportions. But now the engine still churned, and the third symphony waited, and the motion of it racked him, tore at him. And God, if there was a God, was laughing, cackling.

The great man reopened his eyes to the sun and the sky and the bowing, ancient trees and the golden-haired girl that lay beside him, trying to remember the days when the audiences had actually listened before they applauded, when the reviews had been good, and the concert halls had been more than half-full. But, even at the time, there had been a sense of unreality, disbelief — above all, there had been the knowledge that it wouldn't last. What was it about his nature? the great man wondered. Why was it that when he reached something, he always felt as though he was already looking back?

The question hung, unanswered, in the hot noonday air. In the sky beyond the trees, and in the stars that for a flickering moment he thought he saw there. But then he blinked, and the stars became motes in his eyes, and there was no longer silence in the dell, but the patter of Peg's feet, followed by a hissing trickle.

* * *

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Crouching to relieve herself on the stone lip beside the Noonday Pool, Peg watched the old man as he awoke from his brief slumber. She liked his big mustache, and his eyes, and his great hook of a nose. He reminded her of some uncreated heraldic animal. But he was sad, she could see that as well, and she guessed that that was part of the reason why she'd been drawn to him, although she still had no idea of exactly why.

There he was now, levering himself up on those rickety bones, looking toward her, seeing what she was doing, looking away. This was the thing about humans that puzzled her more than anything, their constant desire to be somewhere other than where they were. And, even for her, even when she'd flown on the gossamer wings the fireside tales of this old man's forefathers had once allowed her, such a thing was quite impossible. Your body was changeable, disposable, but your spirit, ah! — that could only ever be in one place.

Now the greenwood was shrinking — dying — and Peg knew that soon, it would all be fields, and then, not long after a green expanse in which humans with sticks would chase a small white ball. And after that, the green would turn to brown, and things would happen that even her own prescience forbade her to witness. But she regarded the prospect without sadness. The stillness of the Noonday Pool would always be there, inside her, and there were bound to be other creatures that she could shape herself into, other myths to absorb....

Surprised and embarrassed by what he saw, the great man heaved himself up from his bed of moss, and turned away. The pain clawed at his spine. His vision was prickled by odd blotches and patches of light. The boughs of the trees seemed to shimmer and sway with the heat.

"There." He heard Peg's voice, and her bare feet behind him. Stiffly, he turned.

"How long have I been asleep?"

She shrugged. "What does it matter?" Her eyes shimmered like the greenwood, were filled with darkness and light.

He looked around for his coat, his cane. Pressing past the girl, he noticed the rivulet that curled over the stone lip toward the pool, and the faint yellow cloud that hung in the water. Otherwise, the Noonday Pool was even darker now, clearer. Yet there was something else....

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He leaned across to look into the depths. Far below, something gray and lifeless stirred, elongated, tumbled end over ragged end upon itself, prepared to rise. He shuddered and stepped back.

"What do you see?" she asked.

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

Peg chuckled and skipped over to him. "You're lying."

There were threads of moss in her hair now. He felt her arm entwine and tighten around his, and heard the soft vulpine rustle of her breath. He was too tired to resist.

"Lean over again," she said, drawing him forward toward the lip of the Noonday Pool. He tottered. Almost lost balance. "Look into the water. Tell me what you see."

The great man hung there, teetering like a swimmer in the instant before the dive. He saw the mirrored sky, the boughs and branches of the trees. He saw an old, lonely man. Then he felt a wind pass through him and ripple the water, and the images quivered, multiplied and dissolved.

"What can you see?"

Peg's voice was still beside him, but he was no longer sure whether she was pushing him on or holding him back.

"What do you see?"

The wind was still blowing through him, rippling the Noonday Pool. And the scent of it was familiar — not feral, or even the green darkness of ancient woodland, but dust, dry ink and cheap paper. The pages of his notebooks, turning.

"What do you see?"

He strained his eyes. The pool was still shimmering, darkening. The eyes of the waitress in that Worcester coffee house? No...

"What do you see?"

The question came from the darkness below him.

"What do you see?"

Not some serpent or sea-monster. No, not some creature from the depths. It was worse than that. The thing he feared most of all...

"What do you see?"

He shook his head, pushed back and away.

Nothing. He saw nothing.

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* * *

Recovering her composure in the servant's parlor, watched by Mr. Grove's kind eyes as she sipped at her second cup of sweet tea, Mrs. France tried once again to explain to him the swirl of feelings that were in her head. On the one hand, she was certain that the girl Peg had something to do with the destruction of her foundlings. Yet on the other, she couldn't imagine that it was anything other than a fox...

"Perhaps you should ring the police," Mr. Groves suggested.

Mrs. France shook her head. "You know what that daft bunch in the village are like."

"But you say he's with the girl now?"

"The little strumpet. I caught her coming down the stairs this morning, naked as a plucked chicken. And I'm sure she'd have gone straight in to see His Grouch..."

Mrs. France shuddered at the recollection, and sipped her tea. But Mr. Groves, she saw, was smiling — or rather, was trying not to — trying to keep that stupid glint out of his eyes. He was just another man, after all. And men were all fools when it came to anything pretty and young.

"Tell you what," he said. "When I finish this cup, I'll go — " He stopped in mid-sentence as one of the service bells above the door began to ring.

"That'll be the front door," Mrs. France said without looking. She knew the sound of every service bell all by heart. His Grouch might have his music, but *she* knew about noises that really mattered.

"Sally'll get it."

"No," Mrs. France said, standing up. "I will."

Even when Lady Caroline had been alive, Mrs. France had always made a point of answering the front door so she could keep her finger on the pulse of the house. She passed from the servant's lobby into the main hall, fragrant with the warm scent of beeswax polish and from a fresh display of white lilies. She opened the front door just as the bell rang again, and was presented with the spectacle of the local postman, breathless and hot from the long cycle ride up from the village. He had an envelope in his hand. She snatched it from him, wrinkling her nose at its crumped state. No, not simply an envelope. A telegram.

"Will you sign for this?"

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The postman offered her a pen. Disgustingly warm and slippery, but she took it and signed. *P.P*, as always, His Grouch.

"This is thirsty work," he continued, "on a — "

"Thank you," Mrs. France said, swiftly closing the door.

She walked over to the southwest side window beside the bowl of lilies where the early afternoon sun now poured in. Squinting with a practiced eye, she held the telegram up to the light. No need to get the steam to this one. The message was visible, typed in block capitals — and short. It was from that posh quack in Harley Street that His Grouch was seeing. About TEST RESULTS, and CONCERN, and NEED FOR EARLY APPOINTMENT.

Meditatively, Mrs. France smoothed out the crumpled envelope on the table, then slipped it into her apron pocket. In her experience, they never did tell you straight if it was bad — not even a knighthood made any difference to that. All you ever got were sidelong smiles, requests like this one for early appointments and rubbish about not building up hopes. It had certainly been that way with her Arthur — and even with Her Grouch, for that matter, poor Lady Caroline.

It was all very sad, but then life had to go on. Pausing only to pat at her hair in the mirror, she headed back toward the servant's doorway, where that kind Mr. Groves and her unfinished second cup of sweet tea awaited.

When the great man opened his eyes, he was alone. The trees of the dell still reached above him, but they no longer framed Peg's lovely face.

"I dreamed..." he croaked, to no one. He stared up at the deepening sky. Then: "What time is it?"

He levered himself up from the mossy ground. The dell was no longer silent. The trees were stirring, and the sun was falling into a cluster of evening clouds. He smelled still water and ancient, dying wood. There was a faint chill in the air. Everywhere, the shadows were thickening, stirring, growing. The girl, gone. Another day, already passing. And the music. The music...

"Why did you take me here? What was the point?" he shouted. "To give me nothing...?"

He turned around. For a moment it seemed as though Peg had returned — then he saw the flash of red-golden hair was really only the last glimmer of the greenwood's noonday fire, now entangled with vines of shadow. Or

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even the padding dark-eyed shift of some stealthy animal...

Sir Edward shivered. Glancing back at the Noonday Pool, which was now veined with the swirling ink-black reflections of the trees, he began to clamber up from the dell. Over the roots and fallen branches, through the leaf-drifts of dead summers, his hands and feet skidding on a slime of wet moss and lichen. A leaf stuck to his chin. The claws of a dead bush snagged at his jacket, ripped, tried to detain him.

When the ground finally began to level, the great man looked back and saw that the dell had already disappeared from sight. He felt a faint sadness, the loss of something already long lost. Galleries of trees receded into shade, brightened only by gaudy shelves of faintly luminous fungi and the glitter of cartridge cases left from Lord Shrewsbury's autumn shoot of the year before.

He trudged on through the wood, finding a path he recognized, a way off this land. And there was the fence, the gate. The lawns of his own house. Staid red brick walls and yew hedges transformed by the deepening light. And in the pool of shade beneath a copper birch lay the white wooden bench where he often rested his legs on returning from his afternoon walks. Sir Edward hobbled across the lawn toward it. He slumped down.

Now that her duties for the day had ended, Mrs. France set out toward the walled garden again where Mr. Groves had now kindly cleared out the hutches for her. She knew it was important that she revisit the scene of the carnage now — on the same day. Otherwise, the sad image would inevitably stay with her.

But still, it was a pleasant evening. The air had grown lustrous, the birds were still wildly in song. She walked past the yew hedges, along the glimmering white gravel path, pausing only a moment to take a deep breath before turning under the arch into the walled garden. She saw that Mr. Groves had sensibly left the hutch doors open so that they might air, and swept and cleaned the bare earth before them so that there was no trace of what had happened.

She crouched down before the hutches and breathed the faint animal smell that somehow still lingered. Then, something seemed to move inside. She leaned forward, too surprised to be shocked. Was it possible that, unnoticed by herself and Mr. Groves, one of her foundlings had survived the onslaught? Hardly possible, it seemed. Yet undoubtedly, at the back of the

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hutch, there was the shuffle of claws, the glint of an eye. Something there. Something alive...

After barely a moment's hesitation, she reached inside. Feeling warm fur, her hands closed, and she lifted the creature out, holding it up toward the light of the gloriously dimming sky. A fox cub. A poor abandoned fox cub. She stroked its silvered head, marveling as she always marveled at the perfection of nature, and at the rightness of the fact that — on this evening of all evenings — the creature should seek shelter in one of her empty hutches. For a moment, the thought crossed her mind that she might be holding a culprit rather than a victim, but, breathing the rich feral scent, gazing into those dark, almost bluish eyes, she knew that that was impossible.

Holding the creature up, she kissed it softly on the nose, and was about to start preparing its bed for the night when she felt the crackle of the telegram in her apron. Kissing the creature again, setting it down, closing the door of the hutch, she peered out through the archway of the walled garden across the dim lawns, and saw that His Grouch had returned.

The birds were still singing in the branches, quarreling and clattering their wings as the greenwood softened and dissolved. Here was the same blackbird he'd heard this morning, still singing A-B-C-A ascending. Those notes had been at the edge of his mind all day. He could even hear the trickling, racing play of the strings that followed the short opening phrase. A-B-C-A, then a fast interplay of invention. The waters of twilight entering the pools of night. Not his own music. The music was Mendelssohn's — the opening of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. And, of course, this blackbird's.

He felt the touch of something on his hand. Looking down, smiling, half-imagining that Peg's fingers were entwined once more around his own, he saw that a small spider had dropped down from one of the branches. It crawled away from his mottled flesh, spinning a faintly gleaming thread, and the blackbird ceased singing.

And there was silence.

The great man gazed out through the dusk where, in the final moment between light and darkness, faint living shapes seemed to leap and play. This bench was still comparatively warm, but the damnable ache in his back was starting to grow worse; he couldn't stay out here forever...

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He glanced back toward the house, where the lights in the windows were now showing. As he watched, he saw that, such was the thickness of the night air and the residual summer heat, that a lifeless gray shape seemed to be forming across the lawns. And, yes, it truly seemed to writhe and dissolve, to tumble end over ragged end out of the darkness toward him. Sir Edward remembered the Noonday Pool, and felt a chill pass over him. But then the figure coalesced, and he saw that it was nothing more than Mrs. France in her navy-blue apron, walking swiftly across the lawn, waving something in her hand.

Next morning, Mrs. France woke earlier than her accustomed time, and well before her alarm. But still, the trees were whispering, the birds were in song, the sun was already up and out. Far better, at least, than the cold damp darkness of mornings in December and January. She gazed up at the wood-paneled ceiling, recollecting all that had happened the previous day. The girl Peg (now gone, and good riddance), the telegram that His Grouch had so long been dreading, the senseless destruction of her foundlings. And, of course, the fox cub. The new fox cub...

In a pleasant lethargy, Mrs. France stretched out on smooth white sheets she herself had ironed. A lace of leaf shadows played over the pale yellow curtains. And could that be a cuckoo she heard? Normally, and her not being a natural early riser, the clanging bell of the alarm clock set her bolt upright and tumbling out of bed, in a rush to get dressed and be down and cleared and well-organized in the kitchen before any of the maids appeared. But today...

Slowly, she climbed out of bed. Warmed by a patch of golden sunlight, the bare wooden floor was pleasant beneath her bare feet. She twiddled her toes, yawned, pulled the big blue-handled chamber pot out from beneath her bed, and stooped down. Then she rinsed her hands and face. Then she dressed. She was still a little premature, but on a day like this, you could almost understand why His Grouch always got up so early. Remembering to turn off her alarm, she descended the narrow stairway to the kitchen.

Ah. The usual smell of Brasso and soot. The usual mess of dripping and bread left by His Grouch on the table. A half-eaten lump on the floor that that pampered dog of His was too well-stuffed to even bother with eating. A waste. She picked it up, tidied, brushed up the clinker and coal dust from the grate,

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hung the kettle back where it belonged, cleared and restoked the rapidly failing fire. You'd think, after yesterday, after the telegram, that He would give it a rest. But no, he'd arisen as early as ever, and would be up there in his study right now. Grinding away. Getting nowhere.

Oh, well. Now that she was down here herself, and feeling slightly at a loss, she decided to set about preparing his proper breakfast — he could have it a bit early for a change. The poor man, really. And perhaps she should say something after yesterday evening. Touch that stooped and stiffened shoulder as she'd been unable to do as she stood beside him in the twilit lawn, spelling out the words of the telegram that his weakening eyes had been unable to read.

Mrs. France whisked the toast out from the hotplate before it burned, flipped over the bacon, and finished laying out His Grouch's tray. He'd taken it oddly, really. Oddly for him. With uncharacteristic resignation — almost a kind of humility. But he'd probably be back in one of his usual moods this morning, blaming God and all the world. Worse, if anything. He was, after all, in some pain. Poor man, really. She backed out of the kitchen door, and ascended the stairs. Leaning on the handle, pushing with a practiced hand, she managed her usual feat of opening the baize-lined door to the upper study without putting down the tray.

Inside, the curtains were open, the sun was streaming. But as for His Grouch...there was no sign. Mrs. France checked around the bookcases. The little alcove. But, no. No. She put down the tray. Pens and paper lay out on His Grouch's desk but, although it was obvious that he'd been at work this morning, the look of it seemed different, oddly tidy.

He'd left the drawer that contained those old notebooks of his unopened for a start, and there were none of the usual scraps and squigglings and doodlings and crossings-out. Peering more closely, briefly even forgetting the tantrumic consequences of Him catching her even glancing at his work, she saw that, framed by a square of sunlight, a neat pile of staved sheets lay on the leather blotter in the middle of the desk. He'd even threaded a red ribbon through the edge to bind them, the way she remembered he always did when he was ready to send something off to his publishers at Booseys. But that hadn't happened for several years now. A new, finished, work? And it looked so fat. How on earth had he managed that, when only yesterday he'd been...?

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The top page was titled. She turned it around on the blotter to read.

The Noonday Pool.

For Peg ? (another enigma)

The words were written out in a big hand, with all the flourish and deliberation he reserved for his final copies. And how nice, Mrs. France couldn't help thinking, that he'd finally got something down at last. The title was a bit odd, but perhaps it was actually some fancy name for the third symphony he was always muttering about. But there was something else about the look of the paper....

Glancing over her shoulder, checking that the room was still empty, Mrs. France picked up the manuscript. On the first page, below the title, there was nothing but blank staves. She turned over to the next. Again, blank. Turned again. Page after page of it. Empty, unwritten sheets, right through to the end. Which even Mrs. France knew signified only silence.

Well.... Puzzled, yet skilfully as always, she rearranged the desk as she had found it. Yesterday's news had obviously taken a big toll. The poor man. And where had he got to, anyway? Even if he *had* actually finished something, she knew that it was hardly like Him to take the rest of the morning off. And as for this. He'd surely be back by now if he'd just gone out and down the corridor to answer the call. And as for this...

Filled with the beginnings of a greater foreboding, Mrs. France glanced over the desk and out through the mullioned windows, across the long-shadowed lawn. Her hand went up to her bosom, and she drew a surprised breath. There was a figure with outstretched arms, standing on the grass, with head raised to the deep blue midsummer. So strange and uncharacteristic was the posture, so unlike the person she thought she knew, that it was some moments before she realized who it was.

Then, skirts and pinny flying, she was out and down the back stairs, through the kitchen and the stillness of the shadowed yard, around the side of the house to the main garden. And there he was: His Grouch, still just standing in the middle of the garden.

In a panic, fearing that his brain might already have gone — that she'd already lost him as she lost Lady Caroline and her own Arthur — she ran up to him across warm paving and cool wet grass.

"Sir Edward! I'm...I'm just..."

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But he simply blinked and turned as though awakened, smiling one of his rare smiles.

"Yes?" he said, cheerful as you please.

Mrs. France gazed at him, her bosom heaving. She felt oddly angry: Him giving her such a turn. And yet....

"Your breakfast is waiting up in your study, Sir Edward. As always."

He nodded. A hand went up to twiddle the left tip of the mustache, thought better of it, and went down again.

"I was just thinking," he said, "it is *such* a fine morning.... Now, Mrs. France, wouldn't you say so?"

She looked around, squinting, half-dazzled by the soft long rays of sunlight that were falling through the trees, her head filling like some deep empty pool with the wind-chatter of leaves, the song of thrush and blackbird and cuckoo.

"I suppose..." she conceded, taking a long breath, dabbing at a bead of sweat on her cheek. "That you could say so."

"Such a fine morning," he continued, "that I might as well stay out here and make the most of it..."

He gazed around, still smiling. Even with the telegram his shoulders seemed less stooped today. And the nostrils of his big nose flared as he breathed, his eyes sparkled. Mrs. France reflected that, after a whole lifetime of early rising, it was almost as if he'd never actually seen an early summer's morning before.

"But, Sir Edward, you must at least sit down."

The great man nodded. He pointed across the lawns to a bench over by the trees, and began to walk toward it, the old man's shuffle of his feet leaving a dark trail on the bright grass. For some moments, Mrs. France stood watching him, thinking of the many things as yet undone in her kitchen, the near-state it was in, and the ironing she couldn't trust anyone else to make a decent job of, and the bread that needed baking, and of course her new fox cub, and the maids who would soon be rising: of all the clamoring duties of her busy life. But then the great man stumbled slightly on a molehill, and she hurried across the lawn to join him.

"I was thinking, Mrs. France," he said, taking her arm, "that there was something I might one day show you and Lady Caroline... But then again,"

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he continued, looking about him, and toward the bench in a patch of sun beneath the tree where the blackbird sang, "it can wait..."

They walked on through the endless morning light of summer.

Peg could hear the train coming, the night express.

The breath of her muzzle clouded the air as she pushed her way through the sharply frosted undergrowth. She halted, and sniffed. The berries had withered on the bushes now, and last season's incautious young had grown too quick and wise to be easy prey for her. But it was a clear fine night, and her belly was still plump from long pampered months. She had nothing to fear from the winter.

The train was fast approaching, trailing a long scarf of smoke diamonded with sparks. This time, the lights of the carriage that the guard always reserved for the great man no longer shone over the sweet endless flow of his beloved river. The windows were black, and, inside, there was only rocking, creaking silence, the gleam of long mahogany, the white-scented gloom of tributes and flowers.

Tumbling out of the night, ragged beat of engine-breath echoing over the hills, the night express bore on, carrying the great man home for the last time, and on the start of the longest journey of all.

The tracks wheezed and creaked. The sound became a wall. Peg sank down onto the bare giving earth, and waited.

Author's note: *This story reflects some aspects of the life of the greatest of all English composers, Sir Edward Elgar.* My *Sir Edward, however — and Peg, and Mrs. France, and Mr. Groves, and The Noonday Pool — live only through you, the reader, and on these pages.*

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A SCIENTIST'S NOTEBOOK

GREGORY BENFORD

BIOTECH AND NANODREAMS

IF THIS century has been dominated by bigness—big bombs, big rockets, big wars, giant leaps for mankind — then perhaps the next century will be the territory of the tiny.

Biotech is already well afoot in our world, the stuff of both science fiction and stock options. Biology operates on scales of ten to a hundred times a nanometer (a billionth of a meter). Below that, from a few to ten nanometers, lie atoms.

Nanotechnology — a capability now only envisioned, applauded and longed for — attacks the basic structure of matter at the nanometer scale, tinkering with atoms on a one-by-one basis. It vastly elaborates the themes chemistry and biology have wrought on brute mass. More intricate, it can promise much. How much it can deliver depends upon the details.

It is easy to see that if one is able to replace individual atoms at will, one can make perfectly pure rods and gears like diamond, five times as stiff as steel, fifty times stronger. Gears, bearings, drive shafts — all the roles of the factory can play out on the stage that for now only enzymes enjoy, inside our cells.

For now, microgears and micromotors exist about a thousand times larger than true nanotech. In principle, though, single atoms can serve as gear teeth, with single bonds between atoms providing the bearing for rotating rods. It's only a matter of time and will.

Much excitement surrounds the possibility of descending to such scales, following ideas pioneered by Richard Feynman, in his 1961 essay, "There's Plenty of Room at the Bottom." Later this view was elaborated and advocated by Eric Drexler in the 1980s. Now some tentative steps toward the nanometer level are beginning.

Such control is tempting. Like most bright promises, it is easy to see

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possibilities, less simple to see what is probable.

Nanotech borders on biology, a vast field rich in emotional issues and popular misconceptions. Many people, well versed in 1950s B-movies, believe that radiation can mutate you into another life form directly, not merely your descendants — most probably, indeed, into some giant, ugly, hungry insect.

Not all fiction about nanotech or biotech is like this — there are good examples of firm thinking in Greg Bear's *Queen of Angels* and the anthology *Nanodreams* edited by Elton Eliott, and elsewhere.

All too often, though, in the hands of some science fiction writers, nanotech's promised abilities — building atom by atom for strength and purity, dramatic new shapes and kinds of substances — lead to excess. We see stories about quantum, biomolecular brains for space robots, all set to conquer the stars. About miraculous, overnight reshaping of our entire physical world — the final victory of Information over Mass. Or about accelerated education of our young by nanorobots which coast through their brains, bringing encyclopedias of knowledge disguised in a single mouthful of Koolaid.

Partly this is natural speculative outgassing. One can make at least one safe prediction: such wild dreams will dog nanotech. The real difficulty in thinking about possibilities is that so little seems ruled out. Agog at the horizons, we neglect the limitations — both physical and social.

Nanotech holds forth so much murky promise that writers can appear to be doing hard sf, while in fact just daydreaming. Not only is the metaphorical net not up on this game of dream tennis, it isn't even visible.

People can tell disciplined speculation from flights of fancy when they deal with something familiar and at hand. Nanotech is neither. Worse, it touches on the edge of quantum mechanical effects, and nothing in modern physics has been belabored more than the inherent uncertainties of the wave-particle duality, and the like. People often take uncertainty as a free ticket to any implausibility, flights of fancy leaving on the hour.

Developing a discipline demands discipline. Dreaming is not enough.

One point we *do* know must operate in nanotech's development: nothing happens in a vacuum. The explosion of biotech, just one or two orders of magnitude above the nanotech scale, will deeply shape what comes of nanotech.

The transition is gradual. The finer one looks on the scale of biology, the

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more it looks mechanical in style. The flagella that let bacterium swim work by an arrangement which looks much like a motor; each proton extruded by the motor turns the assembly a small bit of a full rotation. Above that scale, the "biologic" of events is protean and flexible, compared with mechanical devices. Below it, functions are increasingly more machine-like. The ultimate limit to this would be the nanotech dream of arranging atoms precisely, as when a team at IBM spelled out the company initials on a low temperature substrate. But widespread application of such methods lies probably decades away, perhaps several. The future will be vastly changed by directed biology, before nanotech comes fully on stage.

Consider a field of maize—corn, to Americans. At its edge a black swarm marches in orderly, incessant columns.

Ants, their long lines carrying a kernel of corn each. Others carry bits of husk; there an entire team coagulates around a chunk of a cob. The streams split, kernel-carriers trooping off to a ceramic tower, climbing a ramp and letting their burdens rattle down into a sunken vault. Each returns dutifully to the field. Another, thicker stream spreads into rivulets which leave their burdens of scrap at a series of neatly spaced anthills. Dun-colored domes with regularly spaced portals, for more workers.

These had once been leaf-cutter ants, content to slice up fodder for their own tribe. They still do, pulping the unneeded cobs and stalks and husks, growing fungus on the pulp deep in their warrens. They are tiny farmers in their own right. But biotech had genetically engineered them to harvest and sort first, processing corn right down to the kernels.

Other talents can be added. Acacia ants already defend their mother trees, weeding out nearby rival plants, attacking other insects which might feast on the acacias. Take that ability and splice it into the corn-harvesters, and you do not need pesticides, or the drudge human labor of clearing the groves. Can the acacia be wedded to these corn ants? We don't know, but it does not seem an immense leap. Ants are closely related and multitalented. Evolution seems to have given them a wide, adaptable range.

Following chemical cues, they seem the antithesis of clanky robots, though insects are actually tiny robots engineered by evolution. Why not just co-opt their ingrained programming, then, at the genetic level, and harvest the mechanics from a compliant Nature?

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Agriculture is the oldest biotech. But everything else will alter, too.

Mining is the last great industry to be touched by the modern. We still dig up crude ores, extract minerals with great heat or toxic chemicals, and in the act bring to the surface unwanted companion chemicals. All that suggests engineering must be rethought—but on what scale? Nanotech is probably too tiny for the right effects. Instead, consider biomining.

Actually, archaeologists have found that this idea is quite ancient. Romans working the Rio Tinto mine in Spain 2000 years ago noticed fluid runoff of the mine tailings were blue, suggesting dissolved copper salts. Evaporating this in pools gave them copper sheets.

The real work was done by a bacterium, *Thiobacillus ferroxidans*. It oxidizes copper sulfide, yielding acid and ferric ions, which in turn wash copper out of low grade ores. This process was rediscovered and understood in detail only in this century, with the first patent in 1958. A new smelter can cost a billion dollars. Dumping low quality ore into a sulfuric acid pond lets the microbes chew up the ore, with copper caught downhill in a basin; the sulfuric acid gets recycled. Already a quarter of all copper in the world comes from such bio-processing.

Gold enjoys a similar biological heritage. The latest scheme simply scatters bacteria cultures and fertilizers over open ore heaps, then picks grains out of the runoff. This raises gold recovery rates from 70% to 95%; not much room for improvement. Phosphates for agriculture can be had with a similar, two-bacterium method.

All this, using "natural biotech." Farming began using wild wheat — a grass. Immunology first started with unselected strains of *Penicillium*. We've learned much, mostly by trial and error, since then. The next generation of biomining bacteria are already emerging. A major problem with the natural strains is the heat they produce as they oxidize ore, which can get so high that it kills the bacteria.

To fix that, researchers did not go back to scratch in the lab. Instead, they searched deep-sea volcanic vents, and hot springs such as those in Yellowstone National Park. They reasoned that only truly tough bacteria could survive there, and indeed, found some which appear to do the mining job, but can take near-boiling temperatures.

Bacteria also die from heavy metal poisoning, just like us. To make biomining bugs impervious to mercury, arsenic and cadmium requires bioengineering, currently under way.

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One tries varieties of bugs with differing tolerances, then breeds the best to amplify the trait. This can only take you so far. After that, it may be necessary to splice DNA from one variety into that of another, forcibly wedding across species. But the engineering occurs at the membrane level, not more basically — no nanotech needed.

This is a capsule look at how our expectations about basic processes and industries will alter long before nanotech can come on line. What more speculative leaps can we foresee, that will show biotech's limitations? —and thus, nanotech's necessity.

Consider cryonics. This freezing of the recently dead, to be repaired and revived when technology allows, is a seasoned science fictional idea, with many advocates in the present laboring to make it happen. Neil R. Jones invented it in an sf story in the 1931 *Amazing Stories*, inspiring Dr. Robert Ettinger to propose the idea eventually in detail in *The Prospect of Immortality* in 1964.

It has since been explored in Clifford Simak's *Why Call Them Back From Heaven?* (1967), Fred Pohl's *The Age of the Pussyfoot* (1969), and in innumerable space flight stories (such as *2001: A Space Odyssey*) which use cryonics for long term storage of the crew. Fred Pohl became a strong advocate of cryonics, even appearing on the Johnny Carson show to discuss it. Robert Heinlein used cryonics as part of a time-traveling plot in *The Door Into Summer*. Larry Niven coined "corpsicle" to describe such "deanimated" folk. Sterling Blake treated the field as it works today in *Chiller*. Cryonics is real, right now. About fifty people now lie in liquid nitrogen baths, awaiting resurrection by means which must involve operations below the biotechnical.

Repairing frozen brain cells which have been cross-slashed by shear stresses, in their descent to 77 degrees Absolute, then reheated — well, *this* is a job nothing in biology has ever dealt with. One must deploy subcellular repair agents to fix freezing damage, and replenish losses from oxygen and nutrient starvation. A solvent for this is tetrafluoromethane — it stays liquid down to minus 130 degrees Centigrade.

To further repair, one must introduce line-layers, workhorse cells to spool out threads of electrical conductor. These tiny wires could power molecular repair agents — smart cells, able to break up and sort out ice crystals. Next comes clearing blood vessels, the basic housekeeping, functions which can all be biological in origin.

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Then nanotech becomes essential. The electrical power lines could feed a programmed cleanup crew. They would stitch together gross fractures, like good servants dusting a room, clearing out the dendrite debris and membrane leftovers that the big, biological scavenger units missed.

Moving molecular furniture around at 130 degrees below freezing will take weeks, months. One has to be sure the "molyreps" — molecular repair engineers — do not work too fast, or else they would heat the patient up all on their own, causing further shear damage.

How do they get the damaged stuff back in place, once they'd fixed it? Special units — little accountants, really — would have to record where all your molecular furniture was, what kind of condition it was in. They look over the debris, tag it with special identifying molecules, then anchor it to a nearby cell wall. They file that information all away, like a library. As repair continues, you slowly warm up.

These designer molecules must be hordes of microscopic fanatics, born to sniff out flaws and meticulously patch them up. An army that lived for but one purpose, much as art experts could spend a lifetime restoring a Renaissance painting. But the body is a far vaster canvas than all the art humanity had ever produced, a network of complexity almost beyond comprehension.

Yet the body naturally polices itself with just such mobs of molecules, mending the scrapes and insults the rude world inflicted. Biotech simply learns to enlist those tiny throngs. That is true, deep technology — co-opting nature's own evolved mechanisms, guiding them to new purposes. Nanotech goes beyond that, one order of magnitude down in size.

Not necessary to get good circulation in the cells again — just sluggish is enough. A slow climb to about minus a hundred degrees Centigrade. A third team goes in then, to bond enzymes to cell structures. They read that library the second team had left, and put all furniture back into place.

So goes the Introduction to Molecular Repair For Poets lecture, disguising mere miracles with analogies.

Months pass, fixing the hemorrhaged tissue, mending torn membranes, splicing back together the disrupted cellular connections. Surgeons do this, using tools more than a million times smaller than a scalpel, cutting with chemistry.

Restriction enzymes in bacteria already act like molecular scissors, slicing DNA at extremely specific sites. Nanotech would sharpen this

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kind of carving, but much of the work could probably be bioengineered, working at larger scales.

With such abilities, surgeons can add serotonin-derived neurotransmitters, from a psychopharmacology far advanced beyond ours. They inhibit the switches in brain chemistry associated with emotional states. A patient reviving may need therapy, cutting off the memories correlated with those emotions that would slow recovery. Such tools imply medicine which can have vast social implications, indeed.

Here is where the future peels away from the foreseeable. Nanotech at this stage will drive qualitative changes in our world, and our world views, which we simply cannot anticipate in any detail. All too easily, it looks like magic.

Suppose the next century is primarily driven by biotech, with nanotech coming along as a handmaiden. Do we have to fear as radical a shift in ideas *again*, with nanotech?

Biotech looks all-powerful, but remember, evolution is basically a kludge. Organisms are built atop an edifice of earlier adaptations. The long, zigzag evolutionary path often can't take the best, cleanest design route.

Consider our eyes, such marvels. Yet the retina of the vertebrate eye appears to be "installed" backwards. At the back of the retina lie the light-sensitive cells, so that light must pass through intervening nerve circuitry, getting weakened. There is a blind spot where the optic nerve pokes through the optical layer.

Apparently, this was how the vertebrate eye first developed, among creatures who could barely tell darkness from light. Nature built on that. The octopus eye evolved from different origins, and has none of these drawbacks.

Could we do better? A long series of mutations could eventually switch our light-receiving cells to the front, and this would be of some small help. But the cost in rearranging would be paid by the intermediate stages, a tangle which would function more poorly than the original design.

So these halfway steps would be selected out by evolutionary pressure. The rival, patched-up job works fairly well, and nature stops there. It works with what it has. We dreaming vertebrates are makeshift constructions, built by random time without foresight. There is a strange beauty in that, but some cost — as I learned when my appendix burst, some years ago. We work well enough to get along, not perfectly.

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The flip side of biology's deft engineering marvels is its kludgy nature, and its interest in its own preservation. We are part of biology; it is seldom our servant, except incidentally. In the long run, the biosphere favors no single species.

The differences between nanotech and biotech lie in *style*. Of course functions can blend as we change scales, but there is a distinction in modes.

Cells get their energy by diffusion of gases and liquids; nanotech must be driven by electrical currents on fixed circuits. Cells contain and moderate with spongy membranes; nanoengines must have specific geometries, with little slack allowed. Natural things grow "organically," with parts adjusting to one another; nanobuilders must stack together identical units, like tinker-toys.

The Natural style vs. the Mechanical style will be the essential battleground of tiny technology. Mechanicals we must design from scratch. Naturals will and have evolved; their talents we get for free. Each will have its uses.

Naturals can make things quickly, easily, including copies of themselves — reproduction. They do this by having what Drexler terms "selective stickiness" — the matching of complementary patterns when large molecules like proteins collide. If they fit, they stick. Thermal agitation makes them smack into each other many millions of times a second, letting the stickiness work to mate the right molecules.

Naturals build, and as time goes on, they build better — through evolution. In Naturals, genes diffuse, meeting each other in myriad combinations. Minor facets of our faces change so much from one person to the next that we can tell all our friends apart at a glance (except for identical twins, like me).

These genes collide in the population, making evolutionary change far more rapid because genes can spread through the species, getting tried out in many combinations. Eventually, some do far better, and spread to everyone in later generations.

This diffusion mechanism makes sexually reproduced Naturals change constantly. Mechanicals — robots of any size, down to nanotech — have no need of such; they are designed. There is no point in building into nanomachines the array of special talents needed to make them evolve — in fact, it's a hindrance. It could become a danger, too.

We don't want nanobots which adapt to the random forces of their environment, taking off on some un-

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known selection vector. We want them to *do their job*. And only their job.

So nanotech must use the Mechanical virtues: rigid, geometric structures; positional assembly of parts; clear channels of transport for energy, information and materials. Mechanicals should not copy Naturals, especially in aping the ability to evolve.

This simple distinction should lessen many calls of alarm about such invisible, powerful agents. They can't escape into the biosphere and wreck it. Their style and elements are fundamentally alien to our familiar Naturals, born red in tooth and claw.

Nanobots' real problem will be to *survive* in their working environment, including our bodies. Imagine what your immune system will want to do to an invading band of unsuspecting nanobots, fresh off the farm.

In fact, their first generation will probably have to live in odd chemical soups, energy rich (like, say, hydrogen peroxide or even ozone) and free of Natural predators. Any escaping from their chemical cloister will probably get eaten — though they might get spat right back out, too, as indigestible.

The "gray goo" problem of nanotech, in which ugly messes consume beautiful flora and fauna, need not occur, precisely because the goo will be gray. It need not have built into it the rugged, hearty defenses which are the down payment for anything which seeks to use sunlight, water and air to propagate itself. Gray goo will get eaten by green goo — maybe by a slime mold, which has four billion years of survival skills and appetite built in.

So nanotech will not be able to exponentially push its numbers, unless we deliberately design it that way, taking great trouble to do so. Accidental runaway is quite unlikely. Malicious nanobots made to bring havoc, though, through special talents — say, replacing all the carbon in your body with nitrogen — could be a catastrophe.

When machines begin to design themselves, we approach the problems of Natural-style evolution. Even so, design is not like genetic diffusion. In principle, it is much faster. Think of how fast cars developed in the last century, versus trees.

That problem lies far beyond the simple advent of nanotech. It will come, but only after decades of intense development one or two levels above, in the hotbed of biotech.

What uses we make of machines at the atomic level will depend utterly on the unforeseeable tools we'll have at the molecular level. That is why thinking about nanotech is un-

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doubtedly fun, but perhaps largely futile. Certainly such notions must be constrained by knowing how very much biology can do, and will do, long before we reach that last frontier of the very, very small.

Comments (and objections!) to this column are welcome. Please send them to Gregory Benford, Physics Department, Univ. Calif., Irvine, CA 92717. For e-mail: gbenford@uci.edu.

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L. Timmel Duchamp's stories have sold to Pulphouse: the Hardback Magazine, Asimov's Science Fiction, *and Bantam's Full Spectrum anthologies. Her first story for* F&SF *(January, 1994) received a lot of critical notice and acclaim. Her second should get a lot of attention as well.*

"De Secretis Mulierum" postulates a device that actually allows historians to view history as it is being made. Not surprisingly, that device changes the perception of history. But the change comes not so much from the events, but from the history makers themselves. What if people were not as they appeared? What then?

De Secretis Mulierum

By L. Timmel Duchamp

Those who resort to authority to win an argument privilege rote memory over intelligent reasoning.
Leonardo da Vinci

ELENA:

TWO MONTHS AGO YOU e-mailed me a request for access to journal and diary entries, notes, letters and any other documents that might shed new light on the first historical research projects to use the PSD and the disputes they engendered. As an historian, I should be the last person to impede another's research project. Consequently, my conscience began to prick me soon after I refused you, and before I knew what I was about I found myself immersed in all the pertinent personal documents in my possession and revisiting areas of my memory I would have thought long gone. And so on those days when my health permitted, I undertook to dictate a rough,

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colloquial account to my computer. The enclosed is the result. I hope you find it useful (though as you will see it is sadly unpolished). I believe when you've read it you will understand why I could not open my journals, notebooks and other computer files to you.

You have my permission to excerpt passages for direct quotation, but I must ask that you allow me to reread and correct such passages as I deem necessary. (I shamelessly plead health problems as an excuse for the sloppiness of my prose.)

I would like to take this opportunity to express my confidence in and pleasure that such an astute and meticulous an historiographer as I know you to be has taken on this project. Wishing you all good fortune for your project,

Jane Pendler

THE PSD WARS IN THE INTERNATIONAL HISTORICAL ESTABLISHMENT: THE OPENING SKIRMISH

by Jane L. Pendler

If countless numbers of people throughout history have wished for an early menopause, probably no one wished more devoutly for it than Thomas Aquinas. No doubt he literally *prayed* for it morning, noon, and night. A picture comes to mind of him kneeling in his cell, pleading with the Virgin for release from a burden even Job hadn't been forced to bear. Somehow, some way he managed to preserve his secret in an era lacking any conception of privacy (or rights thereof). Perhaps he considered that despite his having been born female God especially favored him. For it surely must have seemed a miracle to him that his deception escaped detection.

I made an admiring observation to this effect to Teddy Warner the night of the afternoon we discovered the "ugly but fascinating truth" (as I once heard Judith Lauer, the prominent medievalist, characterize it). The man just didn't see it, though, and snapped at me that if I couldn't appreciate the fact that the whole project had been thrown into jeopardy, that this second

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"impossibly devastating revelation" was "simply catastrophic," I should at the very least keep my silly facetiousness to myself.

What he meant, of course, was that I should keep my mouth shut and give him "some *empathy* for chrissake" (which is the second or third most important thing graduate-student lovers are for). (Lovers? Rather, I should say, sporadic sexual partners. Did he think of me as his lover? Probably not. Probably he used [in the privacy of his own thoughts] something jazzed up, like "mistress," or tacky, like "girlfriend." To which I even [or especially] all these years later say: YUCK.)

I've often entertained the disloyal suspicion that if the PSD Lab hadn't been packed with an international spread of luminaries, Teddy would have tried to hush up this second revelation of "mistaken gender identity" (a term that had already been coined by some fool in an article in *Past and Present* and not only stuck, but along with the more economical "gender-disguise," made it into the popular vernacular by way of the *New York Review of Books'* series of pop essays on Past-scan Device issues). Though his spouse Marissa was present at this grand soirée, I happened to be at Teddy's side (along with the three PSD groupies he'd picked up from Princeton, Yale, and Harvard since that first PSD venture — peeking in on Leonardo — came down). Like everyone else, I had my eyes glued to the stage (which the physicists called "the holo-tank"). Cameras were poised and ready to shoot from all sides. And as all of us historians waited, Marissa and her colleagues, seated at their keyboards, mice, and monitors, played (it seemed) at being SF-movie scientists. Then, suddenly, there he was, Thomas Aquinas, at mass, on December 6, 1273 (or so we all hoped, since the ostensible reason for peeping on him was to find out just what the hell *had* happened to him during that mystery mass). A great, collective sigh went up at his so veritatious, life-sized presence on the stage before us. Who could mistake the man for anyone but the sainted theologian? He was gargantuan, of course. (Prior to the scan, everyone's favorite anecdote about him concerned the hellish time the Cistercians had getting his corpse down their stairs after his death.) The awe-inspiring sight overpowered me. I remember thinking it was lucky light waves don't carry odors: but then the raunchy stench of pre-modern times is one of the details with which we pepper our students to erode their godawful romanticism about certain overly Hollywoodized areas of the past, and so it might not have been strictly his dingy, greasy appearance that provoked such an irreverent thought.

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We watched with bated breaths, some of us literally on the edge of our seats. (Three persons, at most, were allowed at any given time to move around the perimeter of the stage, since any more than that would have blocked the view for the rest of the observers.) Every now and then I would tear my eyes from this vivid image of medieval reality to snatch glances at the renowned and eminent historians sharing the moment with me. Several had declared themselves skeptics (particularly the French, who Teddy claimed were annoyed at having been outdone by mere Americans, who the world had begun to assume were dead in the R & D department. And though Teddy himself could not take the credit for this fabulous example of American R & D, his wife had had a great deal to do with it). Still, the stage held us transfixed, skeptics and "believers" alike. Most of the younger members of the contingent muttered incessantly into the mikes of their pocket terminals. (I didn't dare, of course, since I held the place of honor beside Teddy.) Each gesture was noted for future analysis, every piece of clothing scrutinized and committed to memory. In those early days, we lapped up every drop and crumb the lab allowed us because we feared each scan might be our last.

The PSD belonged to the government then (as it still does today). Any technical explanation of how the PSD functions would be over my head — presuming the NSA ever allowed it to be divulged. (In those early days, as far as we historians were concerned, the PSD might as well have been magic.) But because it was so high-tech, we were all aware — or should I say afraid — the PSD might malfunction. Most high-tech systems and objects, after all, eventually do.

Our attention riveted on the stage, we saw the mass through. If old Thomas A. had a vision or a breakdown, it was not apparent to us. Of course we had known before we started that the date might not be right. One can expect medieval dating to be off sometimes by a year (meaning modern calendars don't always match the old ones), and though we had a specific date, we had no way of knowing whether it might not be our December 6th or 8th. Time used to get all jumbled up back then, and every now and then a few days would be tacked on here and there, or erased, to make the mess right.

Marissa suddenly approached and, bending over Teddy, said very quietly: "Do you want us to keep tracking him?"

"Sure, why not," Teddy said. "Might as well get a look at how the Dominicans lived." His tone was so casual I shot a look of incredulity at him.

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But when I saw he was grinning, my breath whooshed out in an explosion that nearly ended in the giggles. And so for the next few hours we watched Thomas pray, eat, think and write. The cameras rolled the entire time. Eventually we wearied of sitting for so long, and began taking short breaks (for coffee, food, the toilet) — excepting Teddy, who could not bring himself to leave the room for even five minutes.

The moment of revelation occurred about five hours into the scan. Thomas lumbered into a stone cell bare of all but a pallet on the floor, a crude table consisting of a pile of rocks topped by a thick, unsanded slab of wood, a crucifix on the wall, a sconce holding a torch, and a prie-dieu in the corner. Two young boys followed, bearing on their shoulders a pole from which hung two huge steaming buckets. These the boys left in the cell. Thomas then not only shut the door behind them, but also drew a bolt.

"My god!" Teddy said. Like me, he was taken aback at the very idea of a bolt on a monk's cell. Others exclaimed, too, and soon we were all up there (in violation of the rule), circling the stage. Teddy leaned sideways, so that his mouth was near my ear, giving me a whiff of his personal (to me sexy) smell. "Private quarters for VIPs of Thomas's stature is consistent for the Dominicans, but a *bolt*! Still, I suppose a towering intellect like Thomas attracted his confreres sexually like a magnet attracts iron, and so perhaps it was necessary." Trust Teddy to cite Warner's Law #3: *Genius is power of the intellect, and is therefore an aphrodisiac.* "At the limit," he would often lecture, "consider how Gertrude Stein, an old, fat, ugly dyke, had young soldiers panting after her. Don't let anybody kid you: Essex was after more than the perks Elizabeth's favoritism could get him. When it comes to power, it makes even the physically most unattractive man or woman utterly irresistible." Never mind, of course, that Teddy himself reacted badly to women in positions of authority, and had a real problem with the superstardom Marissa had achieved as a senior member of the PSD team. But there he stood, shaking his head and chuckling, so beside himself he nodded and winked at his colleague and rival Barry Bayle.

I nudged Teddy's arm with my elbow. "What do you suppose the sainted father is going to do?" I whispered. "Masturbate?"

Teddy cackled loudly, proud of his protegée's grand irreverence, and probably hoping Bayle had heard.

But Thomas didn't masturbate, no. He bathed. And he did not take off

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the robe, but merely shifted it around. (Well, it was cold. And thirteenth-century religious considered it sensually tempting to see one's own body.) He started by slipping the robe down to his waist. Then layer after layer of binding he unwound from his chest, and clearer and clearer it became that his breasts were the size of *watermelons*! In seconds I grew so hysterical I was soon terrified I'd burst out laughing. I remember holding myself all scrunched up, my chin tucked low, *shivering*. I kept thinking, I *can't believe I'm seeing this*, while my mind scrambled for an explanation. *Perhaps a combination of severe obesity and a hormonal disorder*! I remember thinking that medical historians would soon be writing dozens of papers speculating on the possibilities...And so we all watched him wash and then rebind his breasts and draw the robe back up over his shoulders. And then...

Oh god. Even now, decades later, I have a hard time with this. (I remember this part so very clearly.) It was such a *shock*. We should have been prepared after Leonardo, but...But really, this was different. Leonardo was lovely, graceful, physically fit. And not menstruating. But Thomas, well, he suddenly, before our very eyes, became this mound of flesh stripping off a thick bundle of bloody rags from between his legs...According to my journal, my first thought was that he'd castrated himself. (The idea being that the vision or breakdown had already occurred, recently, and he'd taken a knife to his genitals in consequence thereof.) But no. No. As he removed the last of the rags, it became indisputably clear. Though exceedingly obese and forty-seven, both of which conditions might be assumed to have interdicted it, there could be no doubt that Thomas was female, and that the rags were not from castration, but menstruation.

In the case of Leonardo, I'd been so gleeful and exhilarated to find that his sex had been female that I'd just about laughed my head off with pleasure. But this...somehow this was different. For one thing, the coincidence was troubling. For another thing, one could find nothing joyful in this furtive scene involving a bolted monastic cell, bloody rags Thomas washed on the spot, and bindings meant to conceal his true secondary sex characteristics from the world.

The whole thing made me sick. I wanted to leave the room, but knew better than to try. Teddy cursed and cursed only half under his breath, and all around us people carried on low, tense conversations that I suspected were precursors to screaming matches. By the time Thomas finished washing the

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rags, the water he wrung out of them was running pink. He did not hang them to dry, but refastened them to his crotch. I suppose that was the worst, thinking of that wet mess between his thighs, no doubt chafing them badly in the chill, dank December air. I swear you could see him shivering. My own body shuddered with tension, and my jaw ached, and I felt a fleeting twinge of cramping in my uterus, as though in sympathy.

Afterwards Thomas sank onto his knees before the prie-dieu. We could not hear his words, of course, since the scan doesn't pick up sound. But I could imagine his weariness, disgust and despair. When oh Lord shall this burden be lifted from me, I could easily believe he prayed (in Latin, of course). Staring at him, I realized he'd practiced a lifetime of unimaginable deception. Later, the awesome achievement of it impressed me. But that afternoon, watching him in the thin gray light of the cell, I felt instead like crying.

Teddy spent the evening at my place. Marissa usually worked late, and always did so after past-scans, since in the first hours following a scan her team always made an evaluation and analysis of its technical aspects and combed through the data they referred to as "telemetry." Though the Thomas Aquinas project had been a concession to Teddy's campaign to get the historical community at large to accept past-scanning as a legitimate resource of the historian and not of particular interest to either his or my own research, he and I did a postmortem of a sorts, too.

Of sorts: namely, while I stood at the stove sautéing pancetta and onion for pasta alla carbonara, Teddy paced in the hallway outside my tiny kitchen and railed furiously about "the godawful mess we're in now!" "Did you hear that bitch, talking about American hoaxes?" he demanded of me as I turned the flame under the sauté low and lifted the top on the pasta cooker to check the water.

"No, I didn't catch that one," I said, breaking eggs into my cherished copper bowl. "My French ear only works when I've got subtitles for confirmation." I hefted the whisk and bounced it lightly against my fingers. "Anyway, I suspect that anything so mindlessly derogatory must derive from simple jealousy."

"Jesus! You really didn't get it, did you! Do I have to spell it out?"

I knew I was taking my life into my hands with my answer, but glancing over my shoulder, I said, "I would have thought you'd be doing dinner with

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them tonight. I mean, it's wonderful, your being here, but maybe you'd have a chance at changing their opinions of the PSD if you talked a little with them?" The voice in which I said this came out disgustingly timid and innocent. I *should* have chided him boldly. After all, he was always on at me about taking every opportunity to make myself known to those in the field "who count."

He missed the irony, of course. (He always did.) He glared at me. "My conversational French is terrible. I can ask for the toilet and a room and archival documents, no sweat. But my accent sucks. And you know the French. Anyway, they're Barry's colleagues, not mine." He snorted. "Did you see Barry? He just sat there gaping at the holo-tank, like the proverbial peasant getting his first glimpse of the city." Teddy sagged against the refrigerator. He looked so distraught I stopped beating the eggs and turned and gave him a hug.

"Just remember, you've got Science on your side," I said softly into his ear. "There's no way they can dismiss the PSD out of hand simply because they don't like what it's throwing back at us."

Teddy sighed. "You poor, dear, naif." He stroked my face. "What you don't yet understand — for all that I've been trying to din it into your head since the first course you took with me — is that legitimacy is a consensual construction. 'Science' is a belief structure. And though the national security guys and the physicists may all think mathematical theorems provide the last word on truth, that's not how it works in the humanities and social sciences — which is to say, in the Real World. By itself, the Leonardo thing could be taken as a fluke. All right, so we've uncovered one of history's bizarre little secrets. What we knew about Leonardo meshed with the revelation. So Leonardo was female? Aha, everyone says, that explains all those peculiarities of character that even Freud was driven to try to elucidate. But Thomas Fucking Aquinas?" Teddy turned away, to resume pacing. Laboriously I rubbed a hunk of Parmesan against the smallest holes of my clunky metal grater. "Aquinas was a toweringly brilliant mind — and a misogynist to boot. So where do we draw the line, Jane? What if we go again, and the PSD shows us *Descartes* was just pretending to be male? Or *Newton*? It's so obvious, something's not right. It's simply impossible to know for dead certain that what they're showing us in that holo-tank is *really* from our past."

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I looked at him, to see if he was serious. "Then where could it have come from? You know Marissa isn't playing with you. And they'd need a team of historical experts to have created that kind of detail." I forgot to pay attention to what I was doing, and so shredded my finger. Angrily I dropped the grater and cleared the cheese that had blood on it out of the bowl. Then, cursing, I charged for the bathroom (and collided with Teddy in the hall, of course).

While I washed and bandaged my fingertip, Teddy said: "I'm not saying there's a deliberate hoax. But when you start thinking about it, you realize any number of crazy explanations could be dreamed up that would still sound saner than this shit about both Thomas Aquinas and Leonardo being women pretending to be men. It would be more credible, for godsake, to claim that aliens were sending us these pictures!"

"All those old rumors of Pope Joan," I said half under my breath, knowing I was just asking for a lecture on the sexually inadequate fourteenth-century cardinal and his reasons for inventing the tale.

He stared at me as if I'd gone mad. "You're *thrilled*!" he accused me. "You just *adore* the idea that two of the most brilliant minds in European history were women!" He shook his head. "It's not going to make a damned bit of difference, Jane. Even if people did accept past-scans as legitimate, it wouldn't change the way they think about women." His eyes pitied my simplicity. "Believe me."

I stepped out of my one-person-max bathroom into the hall, making him back most of the way into the living room to let me pass again into the kitchen. "Just suppose," I said. The water was boiling furiously, so I broke linguine into it as I talked. "Let's play 'what if' for just a second. What if the past-scan showed the real truth. And what if, moreover, we were to discover through additional past-scans that other 'towering intellects' were also women masquerading as men. We know already that a number of women disguised themselves as men throughout the middle ages, early modern period and into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of them were even soldiers." I threw him a grin over my shoulder. "In the earlier period, we know of instances from the very few that were unmasked and punished — sometimes with death and banishment, since those were typical penalties for women caught wearing male clothing. And in the later period, when death and banishment weren't the penalties, we know of particular instances because women sometimes revealed it when it wouldn't harm them to do so.

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But suppose the people who washed Thomas's body for burial were so horrified to discover his true sex that they decided to keep it secret, since the very idea of a woman being so brilliant was too threatening to allow out? And ditto for Leonardo and anyone else who may have come down to us as men but were really women?" I poked the strands of linguine apart with my wooden fork. "Just ask yourself: *What if*?"

"Preposterous!" he said. "Absolutely preposterous!"

I smiled at him as sweetly as I knew how. "But we're playing 'what if,' Teddy. Granted, it's preposterous. But stretch your imagination: what if it were all true?"

The long and the short of it was that he wouldn't play that particular "what if." The very idea of it exasperated him beyond bearing. In fact, only the chirp of Teddy's personal phone (which he carried with him *everywhere*) saved us from one of our increasingly frequent gender-issue quarrels. So while he took the call in the living room, I poured myself a glass of Chianti and rushed through the final stages of the carbonara — contemplating how unlikely it would be for Teddy and me to be still "seeing" one another if he weren't my advisor and I his student.

I CAN HARDLY think of a single area of our lives in which Teddy Warner and I agreed. He wanted a disciple, not a maverick for a student; I wanted an advisor, not a guru. I loved wine; he eschewed any substance or activity (other than sex) likely to threaten his control. He loved goopy-crusted pies with sickeningly sweet fruit fillings; I thought red pepper was the neatest thing since sliced bread. He grooved on Wagner and all three Strausses; I was a Beethoven, Mozart and Bach freak. But all these things were simply a difference in personal taste, you say? All right, then, let's get down to fundamentals: Teddy Warner thought history is all about men being virile, dynamic and getting their rocks off (whether literally, metaphorically or symbolically), and that every event and conceptualization thereof is best expressed in the terms of a phallic metaphor. I, on the contrary, believe that history is the story of struggle and resistance against and sadly often a submission to domination, oppression and the constant pressure of stupidity, greed and inertia. Ideally, I'd like it to be a record of a few brave souls fighting the status quo. Teddy had always been a declared "social" historian. But

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when push came to shove — as it had with these revelations of gender-disguise — Teddy like most males in the discipline proved to be more Catholic than the pope. He'd spent years putting down the Old Guard's Great Men/diplomatic approach to history. But that night of Thomas Aquinas's unmasking it became obvious that Great Men were Teddy Warner's bottom line.

"That was a producer at CNN," Teddy said when he'd finished the call. "They wanted a comment on the report that another prominent historical figure had been revealed by the PSD as a woman passing as a man." His mouth twisted into its most sardonic version of a smile. "I wonder who thought that up — 'passing.' And they wanted to send somebody to interview me, and requested some tape — though when I asked which part they wanted, a shot of the tits or the bloody rags and crotch, they couldn't back down fast enough." He cackled. "It apparently hadn't occurred to them that showing definitive proof wouldn't fly on a family-oriented station like CNN."

I handed him the bowl of pasta to carry into the living room. "How did they find out? Somebody must have been busy. Did they say who called them?" Though the first scan had been jammed with media reps, the only journalist I had noticed present for Thomas's unveiling had been a stringer for *Science*.

Teddy grimaced. "The *News-Gazette* put it out on the wire." I followed him into the living room with my glass and the bottle and settled onto my knees across the low round table from him. "I forgot they were even there. One hardly thinks of the local rag as a representative of the media at large."

"Are you sure you wouldn't like some wine?" I said, only half to needle him. Too busy chewing to speak, he shook his head. "So when's the interview? Tomorrow?"

He raised his eyebrows at me. "I declined," he said haughtily. And lofted another mess of pasta into his mouth.

I put down my fork. My appetite tended to be low-to-nonexistent when I ate with him under circumstances that passed for ordinary with us. But this announcement floored me. Teddy Warner passing up the chance to appear on CNN? I stared at him as he ate, at his luxuriant auburn hair, eyebrows and neatly trimmed beard, at his bright green, thickly-lashed eyes, at his heavy white coarse-skinned hands and grubby nails. I'd been assuming he'd been avoiding his colleagues in a sulk. But Teddy Warner give up the best chance

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he'd ever get for publicly asserting the PSD's legitimacy as a tool for historical research?

He caught me watching him. "What is it? Did those bloody old rags wreck your appetite?"

I shook my head and took a big gulp of wine. "I don't understand. Doing an interview would have given you a chance to plug the PSD. So why aren't you doing it?"

He smiled at me as though I were a silly child too clever for her own good. "It's simple, Jane. A: I'd have no control over the interview or what they'd do with it. And B: The sooner I can dissociate myself from the damned thing the better chance I have of escaping being labeled a crackpot." His smile grew bitter. "Which is to say, I'm hoping that though I'll be taken for a dupe, I'll be excused as one who eventually saw the light." He dug with his fork and spoon into the pasta bowl to get another serving, but of course the strands of linguine all glopped together into a clinging mass he found impossible to manage. For almost a minute he fought vigorously (dare I say manfully) to control the mess. I had to lower my eyes to my plate as his struggle grew comical. The last thing I wanted was to get him pissed off at me for laughing inappropriately. "You've got too damned much cheese in it," he fumed. (Actually, the only thing wrong with the pasta was that I'd forgotten to grate nutmeg into the egg and cheese mixture.) Settling for a much larger second serving than he wanted, he glared at me. "Anyway, the sooner you drop that Leonardo project, the better. At this point it's just a waste you'll have to write off to experience. A pity. I imagine it's added a good six months to the time you'll be taking for the dissertation."

I felt the blow viscerally, in my solar plexus. If before I'd been too excited to eat, now I was too nauseated. "You're serious?" I said. "You actually intend to dump the PSD just because it showed you something you didn't want to see?"

"It's quite obvious it's phony," Teddy said between bites. "What we saw today was somebody's idea of a joke — a bad joke. You're probably too young to recall, but there were once these pair of...chemists, I believe they were. Who thought they'd discovered a cheap, simple method of inducing fusion through a simple chemical reaction. They went public prematurely. You can imagine the media circus they created by doing so. Studies started coming out against it when other scientists couldn't reproduce the experiment in

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their own labs, but they continued to insist they were right. And they got the entire scientific community against them for it. In the end, they were relegated to crackpotdom. If I stick with the PSD now, that's what will happen to me. Which is to say I might as well kiss my career goodbye."

What Teddy wanted most in the whole wide world was the "call" (as he put it) to Harvard. He longed for it the way little boys and girls long to be first picks for kickball teams, rather than among the last few players neither side's captain wanted. It had never occurred to me that such a desire could impair Teddy's sense of adventure or his integrity. Teddy Warner, playing it safe? No way. His work had earned the reputation of being dangerous, bold, imaginative, audacious. In European history, Teddy Warner *was* the cutting edge. So how could he back down now, just because he feared being labeled a crackpot?

I downed the wine left in my glass and poured myself more. "Are you saying you doubt the technology?" I met his eyes. "The NSA doesn't seem to have a problem with it. And what about Marissa? Has she expressed doubts? Surely you can trust *her* to tell you the truth!" From all that Teddy had told me about his wife, and from the few occasions I'd spoken with her myself, I knew she was as arrow-straight as they came. Even if she discovered Teddy was screwing around (which he claimed she'd never notice because she was too wrapped up in her work), Marissa wouldn't exact vengeance by using the PSD to perpetrate a hoax that would humiliate him. (It would imperil her own career, for one thing — even granted she would do such a thing, which I simply could not conceive.)

Teddy scowled. "Who knows what the NSA is using it for? All we know is they've gotten the President to ban civilian access to scans less than three hundred years in the past. Maybe it works for more recent history, and goes haywire for scans of earlier history. Who knows? And frankly, at this point I don't much care! It's plain as the nose on your face, Jane. The damned thing's unusable!"

It was like arguing with a child! Only unlike a child he could not be made to submit to reason, and was in effect in the position of parent here — telling me that he was going to take away my shiny new toy because it was too exciting for me to play with. In the hours since Thomas's true sex had been revealed, a thousand new ideas and questions had been crowding my thoughts, affording me a tantalizing glimpse of a revolutionary way of doing history, which I now saw could never be the same. Except that Teddy wanted

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to see to it that it *would* be the same. I read it in his eyes, how deeply the day's revelation had shaken him. And how all he could think to do in response was to deny that anything had been revealed. I began to see that it wasn't the fear of being taken for a crackpot that upset him, but the idea that Thomas Aquinas had lacked...testicles.

"The earth is flat because everybody says so," I said softly. "Right, Teddy? What happened to scientific truth and experimentation? It was you who insisted that we couldn't go wrong with scrapings from the bones of the dead, that if the scan showed that Leonardo was really female, we had no choice but to accept it, and work from there."

Teddy put down his fork with exaggerated deliberation and leaned halfway across the table toward me. "With Leonardo, it made sense." His eyes looked strangely, almost frighteningly, flat, and gray rather than green. "It was easy to believe he was a woman. After all, everyone always took him for gay. The personality and behavior that had been puzzling became suddenly comprehensible. And Leonardo's father, when his first wife failed to produce not only a son but any child at all after three years of trying, probably had some crazy idea about boosting his reputation for manliness by passing his illegitimate spawn off as a boy. Comprehensible, if not entirely understandable. But Thomas Aquinas? That's a whole other kettle of fish, my dear. And even if you could convince me to swallow it, you'll never in a thousand years get other scholars to believe it. And if one can't believe any particular scan, then he can't believe any. It's that simple." His eyes kindled, blazing a sudden wild green rage at me, making me shiver a little. "And if you want to continue in history," he said, "you'd just better learn to accept it." I'd never been on the receiving end of his direct anger before. But I knew, looking at him, that if I persisted I'd be getting a full no-holds-barred blast of it.

Teddy's personal phone chirped, breaking the moment. Thinking it might be Marissa, I snatched up my plate and the pasta bowl and made for the kitchen. While I scraped the linguine into a plastic container and then washed the bowl I wondered what it was about Thomas Aquinas that made the revelation so "impossible." Teddy kept referring to him as a "towering intellect." Was that the key to his distress? Was it the belief deep in his heart that only men could be *that* brilliant that made Teddy need to cast doubt on the past-scan? When I thought of all the articles he'd been firing

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off, about "trusting Science" and not "going the way of the dinosaur," I had to wonder.

When I finished washing my plate and the bowl I started on the pasta cooker, then went on to the copper bowl and whisk and finally the sauté pan. I mused on what little I knew about Thomas Aquinas, and was startled to recall he had studied for a while under Albertus Magnus — to whom had long been (falsely) attributed *De Secretis Mulierum*, a much reprinted collection of superstitions on the dire properties of menstrual blood.

"You could say that that call just put the finishing touch on an outstandingly lousy, rotten day," Teddy said as I was just about to start drying.

I turned to look at him leaning against the doorway in his best forlorn-little-boy style. "What is it?" I said, thinking that nothing could be worse than Teddy's ditching his project and insisting that I ditch my own.

Teddy sneered. "The Vatican apparently has decided to stick in *its* two cents. Imagine, His Holiness was *outraged* at the aspersions we've cast on the great sainted Thomas."

"So? What does that matter?"

"What does that matter?" Teddy repeated incredulously. "For starters, it means he's intending to forbid all clerics — which means bishops on down to the lowliest parish priests — from letting us take scrapings from the bones of bodies buried on Church property. Which is bad enough. But it also means that if we were to continue with the PSD we'd have to spend a good half of our time battling a constant barrage of attacks from Church-supported scholars and publications around the world."

Most of the remains of Italian and French people were to be found in Church crypts and cemeteries. Though Teddy's specialty was France, because of the Leonardo case I'd more or less switched my focus to northern Italy. Neither of us, though, would be likely to switch to Germany or England just to chase the PSD. "From how many remains have we already taken tissue samples?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Maybe half a dozen. Which the Pope can't stop us from using now." He grinned briefly. "Hell, knowing the Vatican is against it is almost enough to make me want to go on with it to spite the assholes."

Hmm. Would this be something to play on, to keep him from bailing out? The thought raised my spirits, and I laughed. "You know, I didn't even pay

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any attention to the pair of Dominicans who were there today watching. Wearing suits they look just like anybody else. I suppose they were the ones who passed on the word to the Vatican."

Teddy nodded. "And there were a couple of Jesuits, too. And you know what? They probably loved every second of it. Jesuits are a breed apart. Always causing trouble in the Church, from the word Go. I'd be willing to bet they weren't the ones who tattled to Papa."

I groaned dutifully at the pun, so that he would know I got it. (With Teddy I always had be working to maintain my rep, no matter the situation, time or place. People like Teddy never stop assessing everyone around them for wit, intelligence, insight and knowledge, and god help the person who forgets for a moment who all the Popes were during the Great Schism and the dates and places Councils were held to try to heal it. A fetish, I think of it. Not quite as bad as having to take prelims every other week — but close.)

"Christ, it's been a long day," Teddy said suddenly. He opened his arms wide, the signal for me to come close. I moved in and pressed close, letting myself be drawn into a typical Teddy-kiss. Always he held his lips tight, as though to guard his mouth from my tongue while he thrust his own into my mouth. But wasn't that the story of our sex-life? Still, the very smell and feel of him excited me, and so I as usual tried to trick him into opening his mouth wide, first by engaging aggressively with his tongue and then, when that failed, by stroking and squeezing his balls until his penis was hard. (Small, but hard.)

Which made him pant and shake (though not open his mouth wider) and pull away to say: "Hey, lady. Feel like some well-earned sexual recreation?"

I tightened my grip on his balls (carefully, though, aware that Teddy would hold it against me if I inadvertently caused him to cramp). "How did you guess?" I murmured. He loved hackneyed dialogue during sex, I've no idea why. The first few times we went to bed I tried to resist it, but eventually had to give up. Teddy liked to have his way, and was used to getting it. Unless it was important, it was better not to aggravate him.

And so I didn't.

After Teddy had gone I wanted very much to play cello. But at that hour I knew the neighbors wouldn't stand for it, so I settled instead for calling my old friend Lydia, who spent the off-months there in town, raking in bigger

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bucks from the workshops and lessons she gave than she got from her prestigious (but poorly-paid) symphony gig.

"I forgot to ask him whether this means I have to try to find summer work or take out another loan," I said to Lydia after I'd given her the lowdown on the day's developments. "It's too late to get a teaching gig. And as it is I'll have to get him to apply a little pressure to get me a teaching assistantship for the fall." I sighed. "And here I thought I was set with an R.A. for the rest of my graduate student days."

"Jane, I have to say it," Lydia said in her "I'm-telling-you-straight-kid-so-you'd-damned-sure-better-listen voice. "The man's a jerk. He's emotionally immature, sexually inconsiderate, and oblivious of the difficulties our generation has to face. He blithely assumes that everything's the way it was when he was a graduate student. He probably imagines you'll just fall into a job, because you're so brilliant."

"How can he imagine that?" I said crossly. It was one thing for me to criticize Teddy. But Lydia always made me feel disloyal when *she* did, especially since Teddy would kill me if he knew I had told anyone about the sexual side of our relationship (though it was I who had everything to lose through discovery, and he only a very little, since it wouldn't mean the end of *his* career). "He must notice that everyone the department hires comes with gold-plated letters from their professors at Harvard, Princeton, and Yale."

"Well let me ask you this, to change the subject slightly," Lydia said. "Do *you* think this time-machine or whatever you call it is a fake? Or faulty?"

I gave myself time to consider the question — and discovered *certainty*. "Definitely not," I said. "I'm sure it's right. It just looked too good, Lydia. You should have *seen* it — I don't know how anyone could have reconstructed the place so perfectly. I could practically smell the stone and dirt and smoke endemic to those places in winter. There was filth on the stone floors — even around the altar. And in Thomas's cell — rodent droppings! On his pallet! I mean, who would gratuitously think up *that*! And it gave you the feeling that in summer the place would be swarming with insects. Well, Naples, you have to expect that, of course. This was December. The walls were sweating with humidity. You could just about feel the damp chill clinging to your skin. And there's old Thomas wearing his wool robe, which probably scratched no end, the hem of it utterly, disgustingly, filthy..."

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"Sounds delightful," Lydia said.

"Get rid of any ideas that vacationing in a monastery would have been a relief from the anxieties of the world," I lectured. "Granted, there were exceptions — because we're always reading about corrupt, luxurious places needing reformation. But in most religious houses, not only did you have to spend a lot of time praying, but the food tended to be awful, the accommodations wretched, and you had no privacy — with a few exceptions. Some orders required even the abbot to sleep in the dorm with his subordinates. Fortunately for Thomas, anyway, the Dominicans, though mendicants, provided privileges for their scholars and abbots. And of course, just looking at him, you can see that Thomas didn't exactly starve. But then we had the opportunity to see him at a meal, and it looked as though he did pretty well for himself, at least in the size of the portion he was served."

"So you're saying it was too authentic to have been faked."

"Right. Anyway, what possible motive could the physicists and the NSA have for duping us? If there isn't really a time-scan device and they're for some reason trying to give us the impression there is, then you'd think they'd show us what we'd expect to see." Irritated by the light, I got up, switched off the lamp, and flung open the window so that I could look out into the mild June night.

"Ye-es," Lydia said, "but conversely, if the NSA wanted to make you think the thing was useless, then feeding historians something they'd be bound to reject would be a perfect — if expensively devious — tactic."

The suggestion hit me like a blow in the gut. "Jesus, Lydia, thanks. If the Devil ever wants an advocate, I'll be sure to send in a recommendation for your services."

"On the other hand," Lydia said thoughtfully, "there's obviously a limit to how much they can fake, even for the NSA. Wouldn't you think?"

"What I want to know is why they won't allow anyone to get more than three hundred years closer to the present.[1] You know, Lydia, when I

[1]Back then we were still rather wide-eyed and naive about the uses to which the NSA were putting the PSD. It's perfectly obvious now that besides not wanting to expose any of the many embarrassments of US history to the general public, the main reason was the NSA's desire to keep the public from realizing that by taking DNA from living persons they could scan even the most immediate past. It's my belief that the NSA

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reminded Teddy of how Leonardo on recording his father's death credited the old letch with ten sons and two daughters — which is to say, one son by the third wife and nine sons and two daughters by the fourth — he omitted himself from the tally, Teddy saw the significance at once. A slip, Freud called it. But then Freud thought the formality of the notation was weird, when it was basically following the ritual of the day. The appropriate question is, how would Leonardo describe himself to himself? As his father's oldest — albeit illegitimate — of eleven sons? Or as his third daughter who just happened to be passing herself off as a man?" I sighed. "The entire subject of Leonardo is vexed with such ambiguities and riddles. He loved indulging in pretense and disguise — he actually wrote a fictitious letter he never sent to the Viceroy of the Sultan of Babylonia, presenting himself as an engineer who had worked in the East, providing a long description of places he had never in his life traveled to, much less worked in. Anyway, there are many riddles and enigmas that have stymied scholars who have tried to make a study of Leonardo's life. And I declare it now loudly and forcefully (as Teddy would always have me make any statement): the past-scan revelation, I believe, can settle most of them."

"Ah," Lydia said. "Sounds like we're preparing to invoke Occam's razor."

The idea tickled me. "With Leonardo, yes!" I said. Maybe, arguing thus, I would have a chance to hold onto my PSD project after all. "With Thomas, of course, it's a bit different. But you do realize, don't you, that we have very few hard facts about anyone's childhood for most of preindustrial European history. Most of what we have are anecdotes, repeated over and over as tradition. For instance, it's speculated that Thomas of Aquinas might have had a brother who was a poet. But no one can say for certain. Any biographical detail, basically, is iffy. And if legends, myths, gossip and speculation are major sources of biographical fact, well you can imagine how much credence we can place in the tradition should new historical material come to light challenging it."

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allowed historians to use the PSD because they guessed (correctly) that for a while at least it would give people the impression it worked only in the reasonably far past. Domestic and foreign regulations to preserve privacy came only after a federal prosecutor introduced a past-scan as evidence in court (thereby unleashing a firestorm of concern that ringed the globe).

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"Query," Lydia said. "Just when are you — if, that is, you are — going to start referring to Leonardo and Thomas as 'she'?" The question made me guffaw in surprise. Oddly enough, it hadn't at that point occurred to me that I might need to change the pronouns. (Which is to say, I hadn't yet started to consider whether their gender designations should be changed strictly to accommodate their sex.) "But speaking of challenges," Lydia continued, "maybe you can get him to listen to reason. Challenge him to test the past-scan. If I've understood the little bit you've told me about the methodology, you can keep tracking the same person with little extra trouble. So why not do it? And if it is all simulated, then they'll have to fake a breakdown of the machine, right? Since they can't possibly keep up with the demand, especially if they're given no advance warning about what dates you're interested in pursuing."

I switched the receiver to the other, cooler ear. Lydia's suggestion made sense. But if as I guessed Teddy had an emotional need to shut down PSD use by historians, he'd probably oppose such a test. After all, he'd actually said that he'd be more willing to believe extraterrestrial aliens were feeding us the images before he'd believe that Thomas Aquinas had been female.

"You know," I said, "maybe I should have a talk with Marissa Warner. What do you think?" The idea scared me half to death, but when it came to the PSD, Marissa was where it was at.

"I don't know," Lydia said cautiously. "Do you think she knows...or guesses, about you and — "

"No! Of course not!" (Horror of horrors!) "But I am — or rather was — assigned as a research assistant to a PSD project, you know."

"Well I wish you luck," Lydia said.

Hah. I wished me luck, too.

WALKING IN to campus the next morning I allowed myself to be drawn into a reverie about Thomas and Leonardo (rather than working out what exactly I should — and should not — say to Marissa Warner). The almost diametrically opposed attitudes toward their assumption of gender-disguise had begun to obsess me. Unable to sleep after talking to Lydia, I'd studied my computer-generated still images from the scan we'd done of Leonardo and my notes on the scan on Thomas, and dictated a few

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ideas to my computer as they occurred to me. (Considering the bizarreness of the scan results, the kind of thinking one does in the middle of the night is just about appropriate.) I could not get out of my mind how joyfully Leonardo had bathed and dressed his female body (which, by the way, had immediately struck me as bearing a marked similarity to his painting of John the Baptist-cum-Bacchus: right down to the breasts, too). But of course someone who infused his paintings with such tender erotic sensuality *had* to have taken pleasure in his/her body. And add to that Leonardo's persistent playfulness — his love of disguise and invention...and yet his care to avoid intimate sexual relationships that would put him at risk of public exposure (though probably he assumed that if worse came to worst at least one of his patrons would save him from the harshest penalties of the law). While Thomas — poor, poor Thomas, afflicted with the notion that woman exists to serve man sexually as sewer! And bearing the burden of a disguise that enmeshed him in a constant commission of what he himself characterized as a serious sin, Thomas who believed it all, who took authority seriously, who was so earnest and heavy and *careful* in all his work — no doubt always fearful of exposure, and aware that before his God he was sunk daily and perpetually in egregious sin...Poor, poor, Thomas!

A comparative study of the ways in which they coped with this common circumstance of their existences would be fascinating, I decided. But it wouldn't fit the standard periodization, or be acceptable as a dissertation project — at least not in *my* department, even if Teddy were to agree to it.

I *wanted* the project. I *needed* it. I *had* to be allowed to pursue it.

I resolved I would, whatever it took.

And so I arrived at Bohr Annex in a state of intense excitement and determination. Though I hadn't made an appointment with Marissa Warner, I marched straight down to the PSD lab to see if she was around and would see me.

She was and she would. She asked me to come in and sit down and poured me a cup of coffee from the thermos she kept on her desk. Her smile as she handed it to me lit her face with dazzling vitality, bringing to my notice (for the first time) the beautiful hazel eyes behind the coke-bottle thick glasses. Strange to say, we'd never talked to one another alone before, though we were often in a large group together. I had expected her to be gruff and difficult and generally impatient to be squandering her time on her husband's graduate

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student. And so her warmth took me aback (and made me feel, of course, unworthy of it and terribly, terribly guilty). For the first few minutes I couldn't stop myself from recalling the little Teddy had ever said about her (all of it negative and bitter), as though to compare — nearly incredulously — that previous image I had had of her with the woman sitting before me. Teddy's bitterness, as I recall, centered on his acknowledged dependence on a woman he thought he should be "man enough" to leave. Marissa, by his account, just about ignored him, spending most of her waking hours in the lab. Yet she had left him three years before when she'd discovered him in an affair. Only after six weeks of his "groveling" (Teddy's word) had she returned, conditional on his "good behavior." She was more like a mother to him — he claimed — than a wife. He feared, he said, he was getting old in spirit, wanting the comfort of marriage though it "stifled" and "diminished" him.

And then he'd always been defensive about the fact that history wasn't a "proper science."

"I suppose you can guess why I'm here," I said after thanking her for the coffee.

Her eyebrows rose above the thin black wire frames of her glasses. "To schedule your Leonardo scan-sessions, I presume."

I sighed. "Oh. Then I guess Teddy didn't tell you he intends to scrub both his project and mine."

Her eyes widened. "Well no. I worked late here last night, which meant he was asleep when I got in. And he was already in his study dictating to his computer when I woke this morning. So we haven't really had a chance to talk yet."

I swallowed, and without warning my eyes filled with tears. "He's upset that Thomas was revealed as a woman," I choked out. "He says it has to be wrong. That the scans are a hoax."

Marissa groaned. "Isn't that just like the man! Nicked his male ego, I suppose. Threatened his gender superiority. So what else, but that the past-scan device must be to blame!" She shook her head and sighed.

To my deep shame and embarrassment, I broke down into loud choking sobs, the kind I usually confine to my pillow.

Marissa shoved a box of tissues at me. "Better you do this with me than with Teddy," she said. "He thinks that women cry only to manipulate men.

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While men, of course, when *they* cry do so to express profound emotion and soul."

I think I started crying because only at that moment did I take in the hard cold reality of Teddy's pulling the plug on our past-scan projects. And then, I believe, I continued crying because I felt not only guilty for sleeping with this woman's husband, but also for listening to her belittle him in words I could only (privately) agree with. "I'm sorry," I mumbled, trying to get my face under control. I used up a good half-dozen tissues blowing my nose and mopping my eyes. And then I made myself look at her directly. "I can't believe I did that. But I'm so upset. Because I *do* believe in the past-scan. Obviously it's not the be-all and end-all for doing history, but it's certainly worthwhile as a tool, and god knows has in just two scans raised an important new set of questions about European history." I sniffed and blinked as my eyes filled again. (It was awful, being so emotionally out-of-control before Marissa Warner of all people. But I was beside myself with distress at realizing the loss.) "I was all set to spend the summer working on the scans." I sniffed. "And if I can't do more scans, then I don't see how I can continue my study of Leonardo, since what I have will be too incomplete to make much more of than a pile of speculation."

Marissa leaned back in her chair and steepled her fingers against her nose. "I don't see why we can't just go ahead and schedule your Leonardo scans right now," she said.

I stared at her, and blinked madly to clear my eyes. "You mean, even though Teddy is pulling the plug on our projects?"

She shrugged. "The grant money's been allocated, and is in the lab's account, Jane. And the general rule with grant money is to spend what you have. Because the government will sure as hell take it back if you don't."

"But Teddy — "

"Don't tell him," Marissa said. "Until he formally withdraws from the project, we have every reason to go on as planned." Her mouth curved in a smile both sly and sweet. "We'll expedite your scans and delay the paperwork notifying the NSF of the cancellation. It won't be difficult to do more of Leonardo, you know, since we already have the fix on him. Or — " Marissa's smile widened into a grin — "should I say *her*."

My heart began to beat uncomfortably fast. "Can we do the scans right away — say this week?"

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Marissa nodded. "Sure. We don't have anything else particularly pressing on the schedule. We could run one tomorrow, if you like." She frowned. "The only problem is, doing it on the semi-sly, you won't have any historians around as witnesses other than whoever you can scare up at such short notice."

I bit my lip. "Yeah. I know. But it will be on film. And will be recorded as digitized data in the computer. Which should be good enough." The protocol hadn't yet been established, so I didn't know if that was true, but it was certainly better to do the scans short of proper witnesses than not at all.

"Good," Marissa said. "Then we'll see you tomorrow morning at eight sharp, ready to go." She winked. "And I won't mention a word about it to Teddy."

Deception, deception, deception — not quite the playful variety that Leonardo liked to practice. It's no wonder I left Marissa's office both excited and sick to my stomach with anxiety.

Leonardo developed this idea of a universal "science of painting," that is to say an understanding which is both alienated and investigative of what there is in the world, right up to the furthermost limit which astounded his contemporaries. The whole of his creative thought involved an Intellect which observed from an alienated point of view, which looked with attention. He was, in other words, a painter who had reached such heights of folly that he could not possibly have been limited by painting or art in general and who was, indeed, obliged not to be an artist. Art was not bestowed upon him, it was perceived by insight. Leonardo was the greatest artistic project of the Renaissance.

— L.M. Batkin

One of my notebook files, <GENDIMP>, labeled "Ramifications for the way we conceptualize gender in history and the wider implications thereof," shows a burst of activity at this time. In the space of two days I apparently produced pages of questions, and several more of observations that struck me as possibly pertinent. I wrote, for instance, "Shakespeare, Boccaccio, and many others frequently portrayed fictional women disguising themselves as men. But seldom the converse (though only males, to be sure, played those

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women disguised as men on stage)." And, "Brantôme wrote: 'It is better that a woman give herself over to a libidinous desire to do as a man, than that a man make himself effeminate; which makes him out to be less courageous and noble. The woman, accordingly, who thus imitates a man, can have a reputation for being more valiant and courageous than another.'" Also, "Joan of Arc was punished more for her transvestism and assumption of a male role par excellence (i.e., soldiering) than for anything else." And another: "According to Montaigne, a Frenchwoman left her home town, assumed male dress, became a weaver and married (a woman). She was found out — and consequently hanged. Montaigne said 'she said she would rather endure [hanging] than return to the state of a girl.' Her wife was apparently not punished." It seems I began compiling these orts not only because the revelation of gender-disguise by Thomas had excited my imagination, but to defend the facts that Teddy had chosen to scorn.

I presented myself that next morning at the PSD lab stretched to the limits even of the resilient young body I then possessed, from having missed two successive nights of sleep. One's perceptions become strangely skewed by prolonged sleeplessness, and I had, besides, been imbued with a mission that involved making an end run around my advisor and lover. A persistent voice in my head constantly reminded me that when he discovered Marissa and I had been plotting behind his back he would see it as our having ganged up on him, in the treacherous way that women are commonly said by men to do (which is how I knew he would put it). And indeed I did feel treacherous...You must understand, I had never circumvented authority in that way before. Throughout my childhood and adolescence my style had always been head-on confrontation and defiance. While others might simply do as they like and face the music later, I never dreamed of doing so, for I knew that for me the doing would thereby be spoiled. But never had the doing been so important to me. And though I knew Teddy could ruin me professionally if he chose to, one part of me trusted him — foolishly, perhaps, since I knew well how viciously he could turn on people who had disappointed him.

But of course deep in my heart I thought I was different. I thought I was immune, that I was a special case. I believed that for all the roughness in Teddy's professional treatment of me, when push came to shove he would feel protective. His habitual roughness with me, I reasoned, was simply his

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bending over backwards not to be influenced into "softness" by our relationship.

I had given the lab the dates I'd selected and told them to run them in whatever order they preferred. The first past-scan had been in 1490 (in Milan), which had put Leonardo's age at about 38. It had been difficult to decide where to place my four new cuts. His most productive years, of course, were in middle age, but since I was more interested in tracing aspects of his peculiar gender situation, I decided to concentrate on his earlier years — 1456 (at age four), 1466 (at fourteen), 1476 (at twenty-four) — and place only one scan in his later years, 1517 (age sixty-five). I could have no way of guessing when he hit menopause, so I saw no point in trying, and instead went for a peek into how he was handling old age (remember: in quattrocento Florence forty was considered to be a "grave" age), particularly in light of speculation about his drawings depicting the biblical Flood.

On arriving at the lab a few minutes before eight, I learned that they had gotten a "fix" on an August morning in 1466. (I had arbitrarily chosen the eleventh, on the assumption that it would provide sufficient margin for missing the Feast of the Assumption, since I wanted to see how Leonardo spent an ordinary summer's day in adolescence.) It was strange. The cameras were set up, ready to roll, but the lack of audience (besides me) gave me a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach. I felt as though I were cheating. The art historians, when they learned they had missed a real-time past-scan of Leonardo, would be *furious*, and would probably raise every sort of hell with Teddy, Marissa, perhaps even the NSF (which was paying for all of the historical scans).

I turned on my computer and pinned the mike to my collar (which I could use since there would be no one to mind my speaking aloud). "Ready?" one of the graduate-student physicists on the team asked.

And there he was, Leonardo, a lithe, sweet-faced, barelegged teenager hopping from rock to rock, crossing a shallow, fast-moving stream. The sun poured down a molten radiance that caught the golden lights in the long curly red hair carelessly tied back with a piece of leather. I regretted that our view of his surroundings was so limited, but felt so certain he was in the hills above Vinci that I could almost smell the olive, cypress and wildflowers I even then associated with its summers.

Three-quarters of the way across, Leonardo paused, precariously bal-

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anced on two teetering rocks, to stare closely at the bank. For a few seconds he reached behind him, to fumble at the sack tied to his back, but almost toppling, apparently considered better of it and hopped quickly onto the bank. Impatiently he pulled the sack off his back and dug into it. Out came a rectangle of slate and chalk. For a few minutes he sketched with intense concentration. Twice he put the slate down to lean over the edge of the bank to refresh his memory.

"We might be able to get a close-up of the slate off the film," Marissa called to me.

The art historians would be interested, but a good look at the sketch didn't much matter to me. Frankly, I loved simply watching the long brown fingers wielding the chalk. I had never seen such physical grace in a teenager.

When he finished, he drew from the sack a thin panel of wood with several half-inch-deep blocks spaced along the sides. This he tied to the slate, presumably to prevent the chalk from smearing. Did he have paper at home he could use? (His father was, after all, a notary.) Or, being short of paper, would he eventually just erase it, without ever making a hardcopy? Paper had been expensive, of course. Too expensive, perhaps, for a teenager's sketches?

Leonardo spent the next couple of hours walking, more or less uphill. He paused often to examine leaves and flowers and insects, and every now and then would get out a fresh piece of slate to sketch. And when at last he came to another (or perhaps the same) stream, he stopped to rest. There he drank with his cupped hands from a small rill of foaming water and ate a lunch of bread, cheese, olives and garlic. Afterwards he arranged the sack under his head, stared up at the line of the hill above him, and dropped into sleep.

By this time I was wanting a break, too, but I hated to tear myself away. I had this image of Teddy happening into the lab, discovering our treachery, and blowing up with rage. And so I wanted to savor every drop while I could. Anyway, I was afraid I'd miss Leonardo taking a piss. Though I had no doubt his sex would be the same as in the first scan, I wanted another instance for confirmation.

For Teddy. For other historians. And for the art historians —

— not for myself.

I got that confirmation about fifteen minutes later, when Leonardo woke from his nap. He yawned, he stretched, he squinted at the sky above. Lithely he leaped to his feet and bounded back from the stream into a dense stand of

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olive trees, where after taking a quick look around, he squatted, slipped his culotte-like shorts down around his ankles, and peed.

I chortled loudly. I couldn't help it. The sight tickled me, and made my heart sing. Needing to pee myself, I called out to Marissa that I'd be back shortly, and made for the nearest women's room. Teddy might rage at me, Teddy might even disown me. But I would be right.

FOR THE remainder of that week I avoided answering my phone or setting foot in the Department of History. Frustrated, Teddy left me a few dozen e-mail messages, to none of which I made any reply. I knew, of course, it would be only a matter of time before he caught up with me, but with all my heart, mind and soul I wanted that to be later rather than sooner. It wasn't only that I feared he'd discover my treachery. It would be an apter characterization to say I had become infatuated, obsessed, had perhaps even fallen in love with Leonardo. When not watching a scan or studying tapes of scans, I immersed myself in his texts and in reproductions of his paintings. And all the rest of the time I walked about in a daze, images of the beautiful Leonardo playing through my mind. Walking through the hot summer afternoon from Bohr lab to my apartment, I would see him, as though superimposed on the lush green grass and rows of maple lining the quiet summer streets, holding his hand still for the butterfly that had lighted on it. And I felt wrapped in one of the most extraordinary aspects I had discovered of him, the breadth and depth of his solitude, a quality I never before imagined available to anyone in those times. (Even monks were not allowed solitude — or were rather punished with it, since few people apparently ever wanted to be solitary in pre-modern Western Europe.) On reflection I understood that it had been an essential ingredient for the development of his ravenous interest in and thoughtfulness about the world around him. Yet it charmed me, for it seemed an almost magical feat for him to have achieved — being left alone with his thoughts, to look at his world and to think about it.

I loved him, I think, for that alone. The rest — his acuity and tenderness and extraordinary sensitivity — were the whipped cream on the chocolate. And as though his approach to the world were contagious, I began to see the world around me differently, too. And his paintings — oh, I wondered, how could I have missed so much? That he had painted the young Virgin Mary,

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receiving the annunciation from the angel, reading from an elephant folio, moved me deeply. I knew that a depiction of Mary reading was commonplace in Renaissance iconography, but *his* Mary seemed not only literate, but scholarly, perhaps because he depicted her seated before such monstrously huge pages and I could recall only octavo prayer books, missals, hours and the like, in other Renaissance paintings. I needed to talk to an art historian about it, I knew. But that I put off, too — not wanting yet to share my love with any other.

Teddy caught up with me the Friday night after the Monday on which we had first watched Thomas Aquinas wash his bloody menstrual rags. I found him sitting on my back porch, smoking nicotine. I had never seen him smoke before, and though after sex he often said he wished he could have a cigarette, I'd never taken in the idea. I concentrated on it now as though it could distract me from the trembling in my knees, pitching in my stomach and heat in my face.

"Well, Ms. Pendler," he grated. I hesitated at the bottom of the steps, reluctant to mount them and put myself within range of his touch. "So you didn't leave town or have a fatal accident. It's been four fucking days that I've been trying to reach you, Jane. Do you have any conception of how *worried* I've been?"

"I'm sorry," I said in near abjection (relieved that he apparently hadn't yet learned the worst). "But I've been busy. And upset," I added — thereby triggering a whining, defensive spiel: "I mean, my whole life's been turned upside down. You're making me give up my project, I've lost my summer employment, and now I have to figure out what the hell to do for a dissertation topic!" Considering how guilty I felt, this thinly disguised expression of anger was probably the best I could have done.

He, of course, missed the anger and saw only self-pity. "Come on, Pendler, grow up," he said. "You're a big girl." (His making that particular statement could only remind me of the degrading things he often said to me during sex, since it was an expression he liked to use, presumably to justify the "adult" things he was saying to me. I have no idea whether he consciously made the connection in his own mind when he used these particular words to me that night, but surely must have done so unconsciously.) "You've got to learn to roll with the punches," he said. "That's part of being a scholar. All this is really no different from being scooped, which is something that

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happens to the best of us." He ground out his cigarette on the cement and heaved himself to his feet. "Anyway, if you were upset you should have been talking to me instead of brooding yourself into hysteria." And though he was standing on my back porch, in broad twilight, he opened his arms and said, "So come here, poor baby, and get yourself a hug."

I hated it when he talked to me like that. Of all things I wanted to tell him to get off my porch and leave me alone. But I couldn't. Not at that point. I had always been careful about the timing on every occasion I had attempted to break with him. (Not that he'd ever been careful in his. One of the times he'd done it had been at the end of a term during my first year in graduate school when I was still being required to write examinations.) If I broke with him now, I knew it would be unquestionably disastrous for my career when he discovered my treachery. I suppose I hoped he'd be more...generous if we were still "together" at the time. And so I muzzled my resentment and mounted the stairs and pulled him inside for a more private embrace.

Which led to bed (even though we'd already made our usual quota of once a week), and thence to frustration on my part, since though I invariably got wildly excited, I always failed to achieve orgasm with him (except for one odd, memorable occasion when Teddy allowed himself to loosen up to the point of dropping his constant, excessive self-consciousness). Which always left me in a grouchy, bitchy mood afterwards. Which began to be the case that night, even though I had been enraptured by Leonardo for hours before.

I didn't stay grouchy, though, since before Teddy left he got a call that changed everything (or so I thought then). As usual when he answered his personal phone, I left the room (this time for the bathroom, to mop myself up and relieve my bladder). When the call went on and on, I began to consider taking a shower — until Teddy suddenly appeared in the doorway and announced dramatically: "Judith Lauer, if you can believe it, has decided she wants a piece of the action." His face twisted into a sneer. "I should have guessed the feminists would be onto this thing like flies on a horse turd. It seems she's jetting in for the weekend, to get a look at the Thomas Aquinas tape. And maybe to apply for an NSF grant herself." Teddy crossed his arms over his chest and leaned his head back against the doorframe. "Imagine, she wants to do a scan or two in Thomas's childhood." His voice fairly oozed venomous sarcasm. "Medieval history, she claims, will never be the same." He closed his eyes and sighed. "It's obvious what she's up to. Given her

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efforts to move heaven and earth to change the periodization of European history to reflect gender issues, she's probably hoping these scans will finally achieve the impossible."

I had admired and been excited by Judith Lauer's work since the time I'd first read an article of hers in *Speculum*. And I would have loved to have studied with her — only by the time I read that first article I had already made my bed (so to speak), and so was stuck with Teddy. How I'd raved to Teddy — only to be met with a scathing denunciation of the Lauer Thesis. "History is not a series of epiphenomena," he had lectured me. "Christ! The next thing I know you'll be claiming that Toynbee and Spengler were legitimate historians!" And so I'd muted my admiration, and more or less secretly devoured every piece of work by Lauer I could lay my hands on.

I followed Teddy back into the bedroom. Should I ask him to introduce me? But no. I'd only have to hang around the lab all day reviewing tapes and I'd be bound to meet her. And if by a stroke of luck that should happen without Teddy's being present, I could introduce myself, and tell her how much I admired her work...Only...no. That would be silly. I didn't want to come off as a gushing Judith Lauer groupie. I was a scholar myself (or attempting to be one).

Teddy plopped himself down on the edge of the bed. "I pointed out to her, of course, that without sound there's little concrete data that can be gotten from the tape, and that the shot is always narrowly centered on the figure being tracked. But that didn't faze her in the slightest; she just started babbling about birth scenes and body language." Teddy sighed. I couldn't help thinking of how he'd dismissed such negative aspects in his essays defending the PSD, and had insisted it wouldn't necessarily make history more biographically determined than it already was.

I pulled on an oversized tee-shirt and sat cross-legged on the foot of the bed. "Maybe this is a sign that you should stick with the PSD," I said. "Though the Lauer Thesis isn't exactly popular, no one calls Judith Lauer a crackpot." Hardly — given that she had recently been appointed head of Berkeley's Medieval Studies Institute.

Teddy frowned at me. "That Judith Lauer thinks God's just sent her a personal message of confirmation doesn't change a thing. I would be serving you very poorly if I let you go on with your project. So my advice is to ignore Judith Lauer. Comprenez-vous?"

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I got up from the bed. "Would you like a glass of wine or juice?" Teddy's "advice" was always meant to be read as a command. Past conflict had made *that* clear enough.

Teddy shook his head. "I have to be getting home," he said — then shot me another frown. "For some reason I'm getting the feeling that you're not listening to me, Jane."

By now I was in such a high state of mixed irritation and excitement that I almost said "Trust me," the way he was probably about to do. "I always listen to you, Teddy," I instead sought to soothe him. "I could probably recite back to you more of your speech verbatim than anyone else you know." Which was no exaggeration.

Teddy wasn't soothed, though. While I would never call him sensitive, he was certainly always acute. He probably sensed the difference in me, and somewhere deep in his unconscious had tumbled to my unaccustomed manipulation of him.

All of which led to another night of insomnia — which I spent, of course, absorbed in Leonardo. Though Teddy, of course, later accused me of plotting to leave him for her from the second I heard she would be visiting, I don't believe I did. You see, I hoped that Teddy, on discovering my fait accompli, would come around. It was the scan of Thomas that bothered him, not that of Leonardo. I didn't believe it would be all or nothing vis-à-vis the scan, and I trusted him to do the right thing, even if it took him a while to see what it was.

Hope springs eternal, you might say.

As I look back down the decades, though I have long since forgiven myself for the poorness of my judgment in having embarked on (and re-embarked on I can't remember how many times) a sexual liaison with Teddy Warner, I am still chagrined to think of my failure to read Trouble within moments of meeting Judith Lauer. When she strode into the departmental office toting only an attache case, I just knew from the tall, confident way she carried her short-in-inches body that I was looking at the historian I so admired. She tossed a smile at the graduate students clustered around the coffee-maker (naturally the only other people around, it being Saturday) and sailed straight on in, making a beeline for Teddy. Since their fields did not overlap, they had met only a few times at pre-modern French (or more

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generally European) conferences. But she greeted him as though they were old acquaintances. "Hello, Teddy, how's it going," she said as she briskly pumped his hand.

"Hello, Judith," Teddy said in his usual robust manner (no doubt doing his best to break a bone or three in her hand during the shake). "I'd like you to meet Jane Pendler. She's in Early Modern, at the dissertation stage. Until this recent fiasco with Thomas, she was working on Leonardo."

Judith flashed me a look of interest. "Really? Lucky, lucky you!" And she pumped my hand, too. I sent Teddy a sidelong look and said something about how glad I was to meet her. Judith quickly returned her smiling attention back to Teddy. "I don't believe we've met since the Conference on Sexuality in Pre-modern Europe, Teddy. You know, the one in Toronto where Joyce Nestor dumped a pitcher of cream over you after you finished your abominably misogynist presentation." Judith nudged her elbow into Teddy's hip, and her grin broadened. "Lord, I can still remember the look on your face as the cream worked its way out of your hair and down into your beard."

Teddy chuckled. (Which is why I assumed he didn't mind her trotting out the old story — one I hadn't heard before.) "Joyce Nestor always was a spiteful little bitch," he said. And his grin matched Judith's.

"But what I've since learned is that there's apparently a tradition of dousing misogynist speakers with cream," Judith said. "I gather the first time it was done to Edward Shorter, back in the 1970's, in the bad old days when women historians were expected to listen graciously to whatever crap their male colleagues might care to shovel."[2]

Teddy burst into raucous laughter (naturally drawing the attention of the graduate students, who'd probably been listening to every word Lauer had spoken anyway). "Count on you to invent an historical tradition to back your pet anecdotes," he said. "I'm surprised you haven't worked the incident into the Lauer Thesis yet."

Judith winked at me. "Oh but how do you know I haven't?"

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[2]Edward Shorter, in case the name is as unfamiliar to you as it was that day to me, is reputed to have earned his initial notoriety among women historians by advancing the claim that women did not experience orgasm until the invention of romantic love in eighteenth-century Europe supposedly made it possible.

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"Well meeting you again has been utterly delightful, but I'm afraid I have a prior obligation, Judith. I'm sure you won't mind if Jane does the honors?" Teddy looked at me. "You have time to show Judith the lab, don't you?"

I was thrilled. I assumed that because of his snit about Thomas Aquinas Teddy simply didn't want to have any more to do with the lab (and, too, I knew he generally disliked Judith for being both feminist and successful), so I found nothing odd in his dumping the job on me. "I'd love to," I told the object of my admiration — and was startled at how quickly Teddy raced out of the office — without either saying goodbye or mentioning lunch to Judith (which I didn't realize until later).

As we walked the three-quarters of a mile to the Science Campus, Judith sketched out possible scenarios for explaining the incidence of "gender-disguise" in pre-modern Europe. "In the first place," she said, "there are a surprising number of infants born with problematically ambiguous genitals. Nowadays in such cases, if the infant has anything resembling a penis, they make surgical and hormonal corrections to create or confirm male sexuality. Now, though they obviously didn't use corrective surgery and hormonal therapy in preindustrial Europe, I've no doubt if they thought they saw a penis they declared the child male, since nothing could be more important socially and economically. In some cases, however, the 'true' sex of the child doesn't become apparent until adolescence. Nowadays, of course, these things are caught at birth through DNA tests. But even as late as the nineteenth century there were cases of adolescents being told to choose which sex they felt was their true sex — and then to adopt the appropriate behavior for that sex and stick to it. Herculine Barbin was only the most famous of such cases, and that because she left an autobiography that Foucault chose to showcase." Judith scrunched up her nose. "Jesus! Am I smelling what I think I'm smelling?"

"It's manure," I informed her. "The University has a number of experimental projects, including work on UV-tolerant strains of corn."

"Great. And that's where they've put this project? In some corn field?"

I pointed past the Architecture Building. "About half a mile south of here. It's not only the PSD project that's sited there, but the entire Science Campus."

Judith resumed: "So that's one way in which Thomas and Leonardo could quite innocently have been identified as male, and then turned out to be female."

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"And then there's deliberate subterfuge by the parents," I remarked. "That's a possibility, too."

Judith nodded. "Yes. In both cases — both were born to Italian families with high social expectations — it would have been of paramount importance to produce boy children. Thomas's family had very specific, ambitious plans for him, from early childhood. They even locked him up for a year when he insisted on joining the Dominicans. But he prevailed, and Poof! went his brilliant ecclesiastical career. But he was stubborn..." According to my journal, at this point Judith frowned, and halted us dead in our tracks. "Oh what I'd give to hear their argument with him — since they had a lot to lose by the revelation that he was female — if indeed they had connived to pass him off as male."

"But there's no sound with the PSD," I said.

We resumed walking. "No. Of course not." She shot a smile at me. "But we *can* get a look at his birth, am I right?"

It was a brilliant idea — and one I hadn't thought of. (But then it had never occurred to me that Leonardo's genitals might have been ambiguous at birth, and thus led to a mistake in sex identification.) If only I hadn't already had the scan of him done at four years of age! I had only one left, which I intended for one of the last years of his life. "I don't see why not," I replied to Judith's question (uncertain whether it was meant rhetorically). "If, that is, you have the exact day."

Judith groaned. "Damn! How can I be certain? Can't I just ask them to track back to the first appearance of the DNA?"

"I don't know," I said. "Wouldn't there be DNA as soon as the embryo is formed?"

Judith gasped. "I've just realized! Though most saints' bodies have been so plundered for relics you usually can't tell much from the bones, completeness of the skeleton is irrelevant for getting good DNA samples. Has anyone done a proper analysis of the DNA itself? To confirm the sex?"

How my heart raced! Surely, I thought, not even Teddy could dispute an analysis of Thomas's and Leonardo's chromosomes! Alas, it was at this point, agog with (shared) excitement, that I made a prize fool of myself. Though I'd fantasized swearing Judith Lauer to secrecy and telling her about my covert scans of Leonardo, I hadn't seriously considered doing it. But her idea of checking the DNA for sex went to my head like wine on an empty stomach.

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Elated — no, ecstatic — at the prospect of obtaining definitive proof even Teddy couldn't refuse, I effusively blabbed to Judith as easily as I routinely bared my secrets to Lydia.

"Well," she said when I finished, "that's fascinating. But to have done the scans secretly — surely that was a mistake. Think of all the people who will have wanted to have been present! Scans aren't cheap, are they." She sighed. "I suppose I'll have to be satisfied, myself, to look at your tapes of them until I can get a grant of my own."

"But it was the only way I could have done them," I said defensively. "Teddy is pulling the plug on the project. The grant is in his name. The lab only did it because the money for the scans was already in the account and they were able to delay the paperwork canceling the project."

Judith Lauer's eyebrows shot high into her forehead. "I see. Well. I take it you'll be switching advisors."

My elation vanished. It was like being fantastically drunk for three or four minutes and then getting walloped with the world's worst hangover and total, utter depression. "I don't know," I said. "Teddy's the only Early Modern person in the department."

She shook her head. "I don't know Teddy Warner very well myself. But I wish you luck in mollifying him."

"Well," I said, "maybe when the DNA's been typed for sex..."

Judith shrugged. "Perhaps. But I wouldn't count on it."

"Maybe I could find a woman to work with." (Thinking, of course, of Judith Lauer herself. Foolish, foolish girl.)

Judith raised her eyebrows. "Change departments at the dissertation stage? And from a department like *yours*, Teddy Warner or no?" Her question dismissed it even as a possibility. Her eyes narrowed in quick sidelong scrutiny. "Unless you've by any chance got an Ivy League background to start with?"

Hah. I miserably shook my head.

"But listen, to get back to Thomas Aquinas," Judith said briskly. "Have you considered the implications for our understanding of his philosophy of the holomorphic composition of the human being? Everyone always attributed his insistence that the soul and body are one being to his having been strongly influenced by Aristotle. But consider — he wrote four biographies of saints, three of whom were women, and to all four of whom were attributed

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a variety of *somatic* miracles. Thomas Aquinas was the original antidualist! I tell you, despite all that shit about women as passive reproductive agents that he spouted just like everyone else of his day, Thomas's attitude toward the body was new and different." Her laugh was exultant. "And to think that all along it was probably because he was female!"

Bohr Annex loomed before us. "The lab is in here," I said, barely managing to keep my eyes dry and my voice steady. I opened the door and held it for Judith Lauer to pass. As we stopped briefly at the security desk to pick up a visitor's badge for Judith, I realized my days of access to the lab were numbered, and that it would probably be wise to get copies of the tapes I wanted while I could. I knew Judith Lauer was right about Teddy. DNA verification or no, he would want nothing to do with the PSD, not even a student working on tapes of its scans. The thought was cold, and hard, and heavy in my belly. For the first time I could remember, I went down the steps into the second basement without the faintest trace of joy in my heart.

Teddy, I knew, would win.

I LIVED THE next week and a half as though on borrowed time. I was obliged to suffer through Teddy's "debriefing" me on Judith Lauer's visit to the lab, but once I finished the last scan I left a note saying I would be out of town, and then holed up in Lydia's spare room. I continued to check my e-mail, of course, expecting each time I logged on to find a scathing denunciation of my treachery in my message queue. Rumors from the lab would naturally leak, I thought. Or since Judith Lauer had likely gossiped, word would work its way back to Teddy. It was only, I kept warning myself, a matter of time.

I broke cover on receiving e-mail from Ben Levine suggesting that I see him about two possibilities for employment. I went into campus full of trepidation, yet hoping that, it being an early Thursday morning of the week before the summer session was due to begin, I wouldn't run into Teddy. Ben greeted me with his usual shy smile and seated me in his vinyl arm chair. He'd found a summer grading assignment for me, he said; and — best of all — he told me that if I wanted a teaching assistantship, he'd be pleased to have me back on his Western Civ team in the Fall. (It seemed an opening had been created by a third year student choosing to leave for a nonacademic job). And

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then he opined that it was a "damned shame" my project had been canceled. If the government allowed scans to be run in his period, he said, *he* would certainly not hesitate to use them. People generally think of economic historians as hard-edged and no-nonsense, and certainly that was the impression one would get reading Ben Levine's monographs on postmodern France. In fact, Ben was a romantic, with deeply nostalgic feelings about traditional French culture. And so I wasn't surprised when he began daydreaming aloud (as he often did when it was just the two of us talking) about all the little mysteries he'd enjoy resolving with scans, and about how interesting it would be to get a look at life before the various networks had been established, and so on, if only they could be done so close to the present.

We must have been having too good a time with our speculations. Suddenly, like a cold front swept down from the Arctic, Teddy appeared in Ben's doorway. "Jane," he drawled as if it were two syllables — and a declaration of proprietorship. "I had no idea you were back in town." He nodded coólly at Ben.

My face creaked and stretched into a stiff facsimile of a smile. The cold fingers of anxiety creeping over the back of my neck made me shiver in spite of the mid-June heat. And when I took a good look at Teddy, and saw that he not only had acquired a brush cut since I'd last seen him but had shaved his beard and mustache as well, my anxiety shoved me nearly into permafrost. He looked like a stranger; only his voice and posture were familiar. Since Teddy stressed in both his lectures and his own research that every aspect of one's appearance and behavior signified, I couldn't help but think it must have to do with the PSD imbroglio — and with my (and Marissa's) treachery. "I just got in this morning," I said feebly. "Ben's found me some employment."

Teddy smiled tightly. "That's marvelous, simply marvelous, Jane. When you finish here, come on down to the office, will you?"

Ben didn't keep me long since I wasn't much good for shooting even the mildest breeze after that. My hands were cold and sweaty and my knees shaking violently when I stepped into the corridor. Coward I might be, but I knew the showdown had to come, and that prolonging it would keep me from working and sleeping, and would royally trash my body. So after a quick duck into the women's room, I marched my bod down the corridor — long, dim, echo-prone — listening to the shuffle of my sandals on the ancient

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linoleum, eyes focused balefully on the rectangle of light flowing out of Teddy's office onto the dark corridor floor, wondering what I was going to say when he told me he knew what I'd been up to.

Poised on his threshold, I flashed back to how tense and intimidated I had been the first few dozen times I'd visited him in his office. Other graduate students taking his courses or teaching for him generally indulged extreme gallows humor before such visits, to try to defuse the generalized sense of dread he inspired in most of us. It had been a long time since I'd felt that afraid of Teddy. "Knock, knock," I said, miserably panning my eyes over the mess of papers and books on his desk.

"Well, Pendler?" His voice was a low growl. "And just what do you have to say for yourself? Hmmmm? Got a good defense lined up, have you?"

In the quick-mounting silence I looked everywhere but at him.

Teddy heaved a great, weary sigh. "You could at least do me the courtesy of letting me know when you're leaving town — and giving me some idea of when you're expecting to return," he said.

I snatched a quick look at his face. Could that be what he was pissed at me for? My ears buzzed and my vision dimmed. For a few cold and sweaty seconds I thought I was going to pass out. Of course, I told myself, it still could be that he knows, but is setting me up...But no, I knew Teddy. Though he usually played his hand adroitly and astutely enough in departmental politics, he'd have no reason to take so much trouble to get me. Why bother when it would make him feel better simply to stomp me?

While I stood there dithering, Teddy got up and did the nearly unthinkable. He came around his desk, closed the door — notwithstanding the presence of half a dozen colleagues up the corridor as likely as not to notice — and clamping his arms around me, fastened his lips to mine. "God, Jane, I missed you," he said hoarsely into my ear. "Why the hell didn't you give me some notice? Unless — " Teddy drew a little away to look at me — "but hey, I haven't got competition to contend with — or do I?"

Just Leonardo, I wished I could say. I disengaged myself. I rubbed my cheeks and chin. It had been a long time since anyone had given me beard-burn. "You know we shouldn't have the door closed," I said softly as I pulled it open again.

Teddy mimed tearing at his hair, but sank meekly into the vinyl chair set at a right angle to the vinyl couch (which was my place, of course). The

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situation was intolerable. It had been bad enough to have been deceiving the entire department by carrying on sexually with Teddy, but to find myself deceiving him, too, was suddenly more than I could stomach.

Grimly I dumped my book bag on the section of the couch closest to Teddy and seated myself on the other side of it. "Ben Levine and I were just talking about the PSD," I said.

Teddy rolled his eyes and shook his head at my apparent idiocy. "Come on, lady, give me a break. Let's just drop the subject — for good — and everybody will be happy. All right?"

"But really, Teddy," I said. "He says that though it does seem to be quite a large coincidence that both Leonardo and Thomas were shown to be female, it doesn't shake his confidence in the PSD. In fact he says he's been wishing he could do scans apropos his own research."

"My good friend Ben Levine is an admirably competent postmodern Europeanist," Teddy said evenly. "But when it comes to preindustrial Europe, the man don't know shit."

"What does that have to do with it?" I said. I drew a deep breath. "What, do you think that maybe Ben doesn't fully appreciate just how brilliant Thomas Aquinas was? And that if he did, he'd realize that it's totally impossible he could not only have lacked testicles, but been a menstruating freak otherwise known by the designation *female*?"

Teddy's eyes *smoldered*. I half-expected smoke to start pouring out of his ears. "Jane, you don't know what you're talking about. And you're getting *shrill*. I'd just chill out on this if I were you."

So. I had now officially become *shrill*. And ignorantly garrulous. I've always hated those kinds of arguments, and tried to avoid them. You never really could win them. But this was my work, my future, my passion on the line. I had to at least *try*. I folded my hands and stared down at them for a few seconds, then looked back at Teddy and said as calmly as I could, "Come on, Teddy. This isn't a dictatorship here. And nothing has ever been so important to me as my dissertation project. Yet you make your fiat and tell me we can't even discuss it. Why, Teddy? Why can't we discuss it?"

Did I expect him to tell me the subject upset him?

Teddy pulled his tense, trembling lips into a sad semblance of a smile. "Come on, Jane. I shouldn't have to tell you the answer to that."

Always, since the time we'd first screwed, he'd expected me to read his

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mind, as an attribute of what he called me at such times as he was feeling warm and fuzzy toward me — "a good woman." I tried another tack: "What about the others? You know, the clones. Did you discuss it with them?"

His eyes narrowed. "Really, Jane, your jealousy of them has always been absurd. They and everybody else know you're my best student."

A low blow, since I called Teddy's PSD groupies that mostly to amuse him. "Did you?" I said. "Talk to them about it?"

He shook his head. "There was no need. They understood perfectly my mistrust of the scans." His lips pursed. "Mark and Cyrus say they'll be considering a transfer, once they have time to get their bearings. Jake — " Teddy's upper lip curled, disdainful as ever about his least-favorite student — "says he's not sure what he wants to do."

So he was losing his disciples. But it made sense. *They* hadn't started their dissertation projects yet, and weren't even past prelims. Their investment in the PSD had been minimal. (I ignored the little voice in my head preaching at me to comfort him for the loss of all his male students.) "I keep wondering, Teddy," I said very softly, "what it was about Thomas Aquinas's gender-disguise that convinced you the PSD was a fake. I mean, it was all right with Leonardo. Why draw the line at Thomas?" And I thought of his current piece in the *New York Review of Books* noting how lavishly Leonardo squandered his time, how indecisive he'd often been in his creative ventures, how willing he had been to devote himself to Sforza theatricals and dances, how seldom he finished any of his projects, and speculating on the possibility that the strain of maintaining his gender-disguise had diminished the fulfillment of his apparent artistic and scientific potential. If I asked him, I knew he'd say now that nothing Leonardo had finished could ever be comparable to Thomas's *Summa Theologica*.

He shook his head. "As I've said again and again, once was possible, twice preposterous."

"And if we'd done Thomas first? Would you have accepted it then?"

"Jesus, Jane! Just what the fuck are you trying to say? That I'm a misogynist jerk?"

"The government doesn't think there's anything wrong with the PSD," I said.

"Then the government is imbecilic!"

"And Marissa?" I said, thinking of the conversations I'd had with Lydia

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about Teddy's pre-Thomas attitudes toward Marissa's role in the project. "She's like a plumber," he had once said to me. "A master plumber, granted. But a plumber all the same. The mathematician who dreamed up the theory is the one who should be getting the credit. Marissa just applied his ideas." Though Teddy had been proud of the significance of Marissa's role in the project, he'd never taken it as a sign of a particularly gifted mind. "Technologists are like bureaucrats," he had said another time. "For them research is simply a matter of standing the grind."

"Marissa is obviously mistaken," Teddy said, as if that were the end of it. "And now, why don't we change the subject. Maybe go for coffee?"

"I don't believe Marissa is mistaken," I said. "She's got a first class mind, Teddy. All her critical faculties are intact. If she had thought there was the faintest possibility of error, she would have let me know before taking me through the rest of my Leonardo scans."

"Marissa is competent, but not infallible," Teddy said—and then gasped as my words registered. He stared hard at me. "Did you just say what I thought you did?"

I drew a deep breath. "Yes, Teddy, I did. Marissa ran the scans for me that same week we did Thomas. So that we'd get them in under the grant, before it was canceled."

"You fool," he said.

"I had to do it. Because I have to do the project."

"And I'm a fool," he added. "Having been utterly and thoroughly misled by someone I thought I could trust, someone who I thought *cared* about me. And all the while you're sneaking around behind my back, plotting with *my wife*." His face had darkened to about the shade of a ripe plum; under the harsh fluorescent lighting I could see what his beard had previously concealed — the oldness of his neck and jaw, the prissy thinness of his mouth. "I suppose you flattered her and told her it didn't matter what *I* thought. And *she*, of course, was only too delighted to help you, just to spite me. The bitch." Tears stood in his eyes. "Both of you," he said hoarsely. "Bitches."

I writhed with the guilt scorching my face. Why did such arguments always have to get so personal? I wonder now, would Teddy have made the same judgment about one of the clones, if he had done it? Perhaps, but I doubt it. He probably would have gotten furious, but would also have felt grudging respect for the balls it showed, and maybe even have allowed him to get away

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with it. Men like Teddy were always quick to claim that women made everything personal. Yet at the same time they applied the rule to keep one's professional life compartmentalized only to women. (After all, the rule that women had to take any amount of "teasing" and "humor" from their colleagues as "good sports" obviously didn't apply to men. Teddy, faced with Lauer's "humor" and "joking" at his expense, had been furious. Though I myself had thought it egregiously obnoxious of her to tease him just seconds after shaking his hand, in retrospect I imagine she did so to pre-empt an equivalent strike from him.) Not, of course, that I saw his reaction as unduly "personal" while I was sitting there groping for some way to explain — or rather *excuse* — my treachery. I had not only deceived him, I kept thinking, I had failed him. (Only much, much later did it occur to me to wonder if it hadn't been *he* who had failed *me*.) "Not to spite you," I said quickly, sorrowfully. I had to blink back tears that sprang to my eyes in sympathy with his. "It's just so important to me, Teddy. And Marissa believes in the PSD, and saw how important my project is to me, and thought there was no reason I shouldn't be allowed to run the scans that had already been officially approved. I'm sure she didn't do it to hurt you, any more than I did!"

"Judith Lauer's already enough of a crackpot that it doesn't matter if she gets herself tarred with fakery," Teddy grated. "But understand this: there's no way I'm letting a crackpot dissertation pass. *Capisce*?"

"And if she does prove that Thomas Aquinas's DNA is female?"

"After so many centuries the body could be anybody's," he said wearily. "And there's always a fifty-fifty chance it's female. So DNA typing would prove zilch, Pendler."

A sudden spurt of anger came to my rescue. It was the same old thing, I thought. He wouldn't even *listen*. How horribly, intolerably unfair of him, even if he was upset. And irrational — since, I believed, if he'd only discuss it in a reasonable way he'd have no choice but to see that there was nothing *to* be upset *about* (apart from my having sneaked around behind his back). But there was no reasoning with him. I grabbed my book bag and stood up. "Not many people think Judith Lauer is a crackpot," I said. "Some people even think she's *brilliant*." That was below the belt, of course, but his declaration that he wouldn't allow my dissertation to pass was bouncing about in my head, bruising, abrading, inflaming me, making me want to strike out blindly,

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and knowing the one sure thing he couldn't stand was listening to others taking Judith Lauer seriously.

Teddy sprang to his feet. "Got a crush on her, Jane? Then transfer to Berkeley, why don't you. Anyone who works with me has got to do what it takes to write a first-class thesis. You want to come in here and talk about possibilities for a new topic, fine. Just pick up the phone and we can arrange it. Otherwise, I don't want to see your face around here until you've come to your senses!"

I backed out of his office quickly, aware that the entire corridor must have heard his last sentence, and intimidated by the fists he held tightly to his sides. Not that I thought he would hit me. Rather, I didn't want to precipitate an explosion (which, apart from everything else, would be likely to reveal our sexual intimacy to whoever happened to be around). And so, shaking, I beat it out of there, out of the building, off campus, and back home, gradually becoming aware that I'd lost my parent-bird, my parent-nest, my parent-protector, that I was on my own, forced to find my own worms, build my own nest, fight off all threatening predators myself. Did I hope Teddy would come around? Yes, I did. Did I hope that when I'd done my study of Leonardo he'd say I'd gotten it so right that it couldn't have been any other way? Of course. Did I hope that Teddy would not view me as his enemy? Certainly.

Teddy didn't come around, he rejected my dissertation (on the grounds that it was "unduly speculative"), and when I didn't come crawling back begging for forgiveness and a second chance to do it his way, I found myself on his enemies list, right up there with Judith Lauer (and probably Marissa, from whom he was divorced all of five years later). For a long time it seemed he had beaten me (if not Judith Lauer).

But though I was never awarded a Ph.D. or held a conventional position at one of the top departments in the country, Basic Books published in both print and cyber editions *A Life as a Work of Art: Leonardo da Vinci and Gender-Disguise*, a monograph based on my dissertation work. Moreover, the PSD has become an entirely respectable tool, for primarily what in Teddy's day were considered the "fringe" areas of history — women's history, African history, Native American history, other ethnic histories — besides the more mainstream dance history and art history. Perhaps most galling for Teddy was that Judith Lauer's work on Thomas Aquinas not only won a great

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deal of respect and acclaim, but prepared the ground for an all-out assault on the periodization scheme of European history, as she had long been advocating. And finally, though access to physical remains in Europe quickly came to be restricted, a sufficient number of cases of gender-disguise have been brought to light (in perhaps as high as eight percent of all pre-modern European scans done to date, including the noteworthy case of another prominent medieval philosopher, Jean Buridan) to force a serious reevaluation of such interesting problems as the relation of sex to gender, the question of gender and genius, and the development of a very sophisticated notion of how gender is constructed in particular social and political contexts. Such cases have, by suggesting a correlation between the frequency of gender-disguise and the constriction and peril normally assigned to women in a given time and place, underscored what we have long known about women's status in European history — namely, that their situation steadily worsened with the Renaissance and Reformation (notable for the capital punishment of a million women for "witchcraft" and heresy), into the Enlightenment, right up to the mid-19th century (at which time historians variously erased and ignored documentation of the daily work, responsibility and achievements of medieval women because their received ideas about gender rendered the evidence incredible).

I am pleased, Elena, that you have, as a tentative secondary thesis in your study, posited a relationship between attitudes toward women within the subject of history on the one hand, and toward the women who write history on the other. I have long believed that Lauer's work on Thomas Aquinas made it for the first time appear reasonable for women historians to put forward very bold original theories without being either ignored or dismissed as crazy. Historians like Mary Ritter Beard, Eileen Power, Natalie Davis and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, who each stood out as exceptions that proved the only-males-excel rule, posthumously suffered either attacks on their credibility or oblivion. Though after the scan the first impulse of non-medievalists was to deny that Thomas Aquinas had been outstandingly brilliant, medievalists could not do so. (Has anyone told you the joke that circulated soon after the publication of Lauer's work, that the only medieval monk we can confidently label as male without DNA analysis is Peter Abelard, because he was castrated, which could not have been done had he not had testicles?) Except for diehards like Teddy Warner, Lauer's work on Thomas broke a

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barrier, *viz.*, the unconscious adherence in most of us to Plato's dictum that though women can excel, no one woman can ever be as good as the very best men. At the same time we had to acknowledge that Thomas was the most brilliant of medieval European thinkers — Lauer's fresh take on his work made that crystal clear — concomitantly we had ungrudgingly to recognize that Judith Lauer was among the most brilliant of historians.

You did not say one way or the other in your request for materials whether you have read my study of Leonardo. To pique your interest enough to undertake to do so if you haven't, or to refresh your memory if you have, I append here an excerpt from the introduction of *A Life*. Since it came out before Judith Lauer's monumental work on Thomas Aquinas, I believe it may be counted as the first stone in the fascinating edifice the PSD has enabled to be erected.

From the Introduction of A Life as a Work of Art: Leonardo da Vinci and Gender-Disguise:

The first chapter opens with filmed excerpts of a past-scan of a January, 1490 afternoon and evening in Leonardo's life. (For print editions of the text, flat "stills" are provided in lieu of digitized film footage.) The setting is the Sforza court in Milan, where Leonardo served a number of functions for his patron. In the opening footage we see him giving an unidentified young man a dancing lesson — teaching him to exhibit the "virile" strength, agility and grace Renaissance dances were largely designed to flaunt. In successive shots we see him supervising the construction of expensive ephemera for some sort of pageantry, going over plans (presumably for an engineering project) with Ludovico Il Moro himself, then dining in private on rice, vegetables, bread, and wine, reading and sketching for two hours by candlelight, and finally sponge-bathing and retiring to bed for the night. But why begin a discussion of Leonardo's life *in medias res*, so to speak?

Though Leonardo is a familiar subject, we seldom think of him as a courtier. We may have long recognized him as an exemplar of the "Renaissance Man," but we have persisted in eliding the areas of his life and accomplishments that have left few or no permanent traces. Leonardo's female sex had — until the advent of the Past-scan Device — fallen into that category, as had his activities as a courtier and, indeed that aspect of his

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personality we might call "playful," "world-traveling" and "loving perceptivity" (to borrow the terminology of the 20th-century feminist philosopher, María Lugones). An analysis of this hitherto unexamined side of Leonardo provides us with a useful means of framing and contextualizing his life.

Although the analysis that follows pays considerable attention to Leonardo's gender-disguise, I would like to offer a few prefatory remarks here as to why Leonardo chose to continue the disguise long after it must have become clear to him that he was not anatomically male, whatever his father might have told him. A number of historians of Florence have remarked (thereby dismissing the subject altogether) that "women in Renaissance Florence were cattle." Since we have good reason to believe that only sons were valued by their parents, we should not be surprised to find that parents discovering talent and intelligence in a child, or any other suggestion of "male" qualities, might insist that the child is indeed male, and then conspire so thoroughly with the construction of the fiction as to come to believe it themselves. Leonardo himself writes in his notebook

And whereas, at first, a young woman is unable to defend herself against the lechery and predation of men, not even when under the protection of her parents or within the walls of a fortress, there always comes the time when it is necessary for the fathers and relatives of young women to pay a high price to those who wish to sleep with them, even when the women are rich, noble, and beautiful; it would seem that nature wishes to extinguish the human species as an utterly useless thing to the world.

Louise Ducange's study of rape in Renaissance Florence confirms what a modern reader might take as hyperbole. The magisterial archives of Renaissance Florence bespeak the constant threat of abduction and rape even from a woman's own home. Rather than exaggerating, Leonardo here observes the situation succinctly (and a tinge quizzically) — informed by the usual sense of his larger, "world-traveling" perspective. In what follows I hope to make the case that we may infer a great deal about Leonardo's perception of women as human beings (rather than "cattle"), and that our understanding of this perception will shed new light on the extraordinary expressions we find in the faces of the women he painted, as well as in his highly original depiction of nature. For while we have no choice but to

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attribute male gender (and therefore male pronouns) to Leonardo, it is my contention that Leonardo still saw the world with a woman's eye, and sketched and painted it with a woman's hand. Indeed, one sex and another gender together made one sensitive and brilliant human being, an individual greater than the sum of his *and* her parts. ☙

"This is all a game to you, isn't it?"

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F&SF COMPETITION

REPORT ON COMPETITION 63

For competition 63, we asked you to retitle stories as Hollywood might do. We called this one, "It Came From the B Movie Theater," and the best entrants remembered how cheesy B movie titles can be. We gave extra points for unusual books and even more points for the folks who stole from the Competition Editor's favorite B movie, *Killer Klowns from Outer Space.*

FIRST PLACE goes to **Chris Yanculeff** of Polk, Ohio for his witty response. Imagine these on the marquee of your local four-plex:

Big-Busted Babes of Barsoom (from Edgar Rice Burrough's *A Princess of Mars*)

The Chainsaw Barney Massacre (from Jack Vance's "The Dragon Masters")

Lissa and the Giant Poodle Riders of Pern-a-poo (from Anne McCaffrey's "Weyr Search")

The Man Whose Brain Exploded (from Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*)

Mr. Clinton Goes to Washington (from Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*)

SECOND PLACE goes to **Sheila Saunders** of Juno Beach, Florida, whose entries make us hope that Mel Brooks never sees this competition or we might be watching films like:

A Tale of Two Kitties (from Frederik Pohl's *The Coming of the Quantum Cats*)

Two "C" Cups and a Girdle (from Isaac Asimov's *Foundation Trilogy*)

Who Bribed the Building Inspector (from Edgar Allan Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher")

Our RUNNER-UP, **Greg Walz** of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, paused his VCR long enough to give us:

Killer Kats from Outer Space (from Larry Niven's *The Warriors* (or any Kzin story))

Knights in White Shadow (from Roger Zelazny's *Amber* Series)

And finally, the HONORABLE MENTIONS:

The Joy of Hex (from Fritz Leiber's *Conjure Wife*)

—**Wayne Savicki**
Wyandotte, MI

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Beethoven III: The Cousin (from Stephen King's *Cujo*)

—**Larry Murray**
Croton-on-Hudson, NY

Dominatrix of the Lunar Colony, subtitled: *10,000 Prisoners and They All Need Discipline* (from Robert Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*)

—**Carol D. Pinchefsky**
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

COMPETITION 64 (suggested by Ed Ferman)

The New York Times reported on an Author's Guild entertainment in which five authors were asked to write a rejection of a literary classic. Roy Blount dismissed *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin in the following manner: "We loved 'We' but not for us."

For Competition 64, we ask you to submit a rejection letter of up to 100 words for any well known SF or fantasy work.

RULES: Send entries to Competition Editor, F&SF, 143 Cream Hill Road, W. Cornwall, CT 06796. Entries must be received by May 15. Judges are the editors of F&SF; their decision is final. All entries become the property of F&SF; none can be returned.

PRIZES: First prize, eight different hardcover science fiction books. Second prize, 20 different SF paperbacks. Runners-up will receive one-year subscription to F&SF. Results of Competition 64 will appear in the September issue.

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COMING ATTRACTIONS

THE SHIFT TO GRAND ADVENTURE begins in earnest with our June issue. F&SF regular **Ray Aldridge** returns with another tale of Dilvermoon. This one begins in the most terrifying way. Our hero is bound to a rock, waiting for the tide to rise. A melodramatic opening, the narrator calls it, but this is more than a serial. It is Aldridge at his very best.

Hugo nominated artist **Ron Walotsky** has outdone himself illustrating Ray's story. "The Spine Divers" as both a work of literature and a work of cover art is spectacular.

Also in June, **Nina Kiriki Hoffman** contributes funny fantasy story. "For Richer, For Stranger" tells the tale of Penny, who is trying to divorce Rich because she claims he has already died. Rich, who is sitting across from her in court, believes otherwise. **Nina**'s story "Home For Christmas" in our January issue, generated more mail and phone calls than any other story in recent memory. We suspect this one will please just as much.

Tanith Lee appears in June after too long an absence with "These Beasts," a horror story about a tomb robber who discovers something ...unexpected.

The next few months promise great reading. **Dale Bailey**, **Rick Wilber**, and **Robert J. Levy** provide what might be the only ball games of the summer. **Esther M. Friesner** reveals her serious side with a chilling story about a birthday, and **Ron Goulart** provides much-needed levity. Adventure abounds in **R. Garcia y Robertson's** "Gone to Glory."

We have many other surprises planned, including more fiction from **Ray Bradbury**, Nebula award winner **Alan Brennert**, and popular newcomer **Felicity Savage**. So renew now. You want to make certain copies of *F&SF* will spend the warm sunny days with you on the beach.

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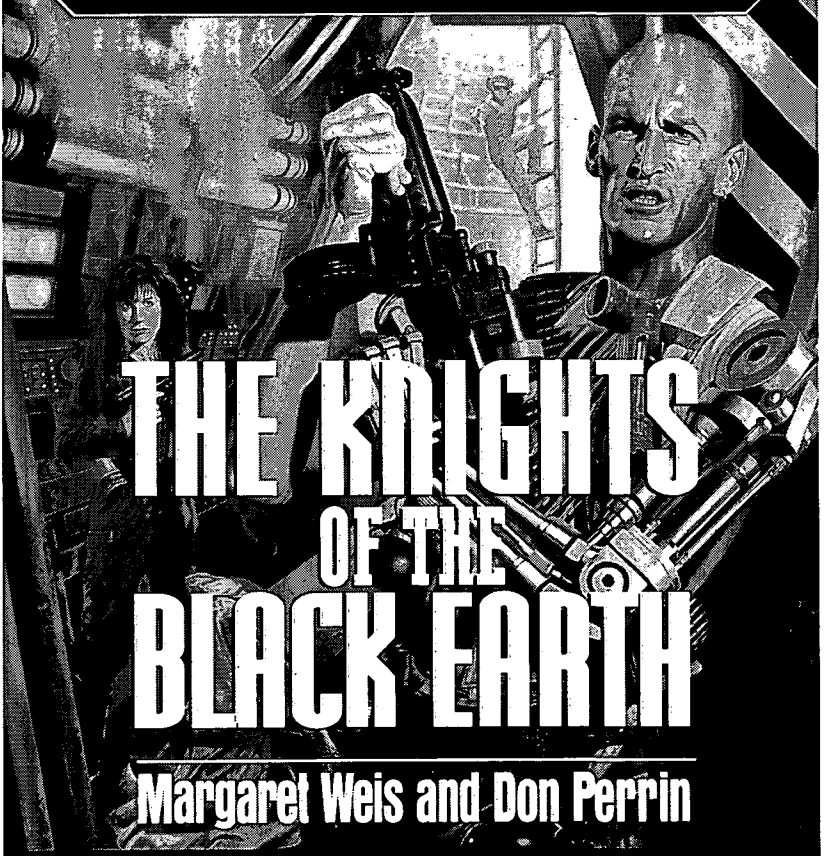

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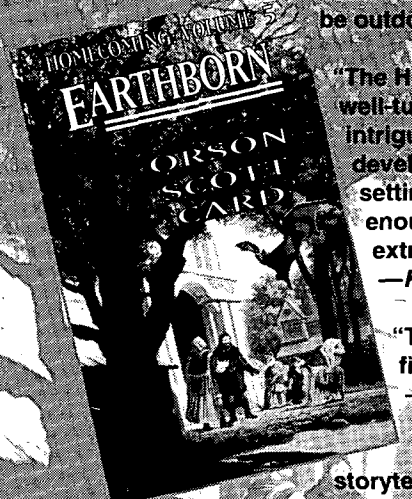

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